ENGLAND WAS AN ISLAND ONCE

Elswyth Thane

England Was an Island Once

BOOKS BY ELSWYTH THANE

Fiction

RIDERS OF THE WIND

ECHO ANSWERS

HIS ELIZABETH

CLOTH OF GOLD

BOUND TO HAPPEN

QUEEN'S FOLLY

TRYST

Plays

THE TUDOR WENCH

YOUNG MR. DISRAELI

Biographical

THE TUDOR WENCH

YOUNG MR. DISRAELI

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Once

BY ELSWYTH THANE

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To

CALVIN and ALICE BULLOCK

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FOREWORD

A deep-rooted, atavistic, indestructible love for England was haunting me long before I ever went there. My first sight of its southern coastline on a sunny afternoon in April, 1928, was a sensation unlike anything I had ever experienced in any other home-coming.

I have no politics and no political education. I am not trying to prove anything in this book, but I had to write it. I do not apologize for it. I hope that its readers are aware that there are only two kinds of people left in the world nowadays: those who believe in the right of the individual to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—and those who do not.

E. T.

CONTENTS

1	August Sailing	3
2	London Was Still There	38
3	Waiting	76
4	The Next Move	94
5	The "Fateful Pause"	117
6	The Shadow Lengthens	143
7	"Trouble in the Balkans in the Spring"	183
8	Here We Go Again	204
9	The Lamps of Europe . . .	259
	Index	323

England Was an Island Once

1. August Sailing

ON the summer day in 1938 when I went to the steamship office in New York to see about my visa and get my luggage-tags—it always works out at a mystic nine pieces—things looked very much like war in Czechoslovakia. The headlines were full of Henlein's demands—remember Henlein?—and the annual Nuremberg Congress would begin soon.

I didn't like it, but I had got used to upheavals happening during my visits to England; suspension of the Gold Standard and the ensuing horrific rise in taxes; Germany's angry exit from the League of Nations; the June Purge; the murder of Dollfuss; the assassination of Alexander; the invasion of Abyssinia; civil war in Spain; the bombing of Shanghai—each time I was in England, and got the repercussions there. So in 1938 there was a man named Henlein. But I had to see Wells Cathedral again, and Glastonbury, and—for the first time—Dolebury and Wookey. I was writing another book, and there were as always things I had to learn.

Therefore, late in August I sailed alone for my eleventh summer in England. The boat was a big Cunarder, where I am always happy and comfortable, and have various pals among the stewards in the public rooms and often get the same stewardess I have had before. I am fond of Cunarders. I sleep late, breakfast in bed, and do a kind of needlework

in the lounge roundabout tea time that attracts charming old ladies.

But about this man Henlein. . . .

The Scotswoman at my table had been as far as Vancouver, to visit a married brother. I was in Vancouver once as a child, and I can remember pink roses in bloom and damp sweet air almost like England's. She was pleased with my reminiscences, as far as they went, and produced snapshots of blonde babies to whom she was the new auntie from Glasgow. Her broad Scots accent, which could never be put on paper, her healthy-minded chatter, her warm-hearted vitality, passed the voyage very pleasantly for me. And she never asked personal questions, nor wanted me to ask them, which is really most unusual, even on a Cunarder.

About Henlein, now—"they" had told her at home before she sailed in the spring that "it" wouldn't happen while she was away.

That was the hottest voyage I ever remember. Not until the last day out of Southampton did the cool North Atlantic air meet us. The steward in the smaller lounge where the dance music was enhanced by distance and the drinks came more promptly, and where the radio lived, was a big stout man with some West of England accent. He was the sort of man whose white coat is wrinkled an hour after he puts it on, to the despair of the Chief Steward, but he had a simple charm and a bright eye that is beyond price in a ship's lounge.

My Scotswoman and I—her brother called her Jeanie, just as he should have done—began by having orangeades and sandwiches from the large steward of an evening, along about time for the late BBC news to come in from England. As we got nearer Southampton the broadcast, aimed at

America, got later and later, and each night the lounge was emptier and emptier.

It was the third or fourth evening out that I suggested something a little more sustaining to drink, such as—the steward's bright eye met mine—a Tom Collins. Scotch Jeanie didn't know quite what they were, but she was the kind that would try anything once, and the idea of drinking ourselves more cheerful on gin seemed to tickle her always adventurous spirit.

The Tom Collinses arrived, and they were very tall and pale and handsome ones, in frosted glasses. He set them down with a flourish and retired into the middle distance. She was hot and thirsty. She plunged in her straw and drank as though it was lemon squash. I anticipated the end too late. Her glass was empty before I had well begun on mine. It worked on her virgin tummy and worked soon. The armchairs were deep and wide. Jeanie dropped off, as peacefully and completely as a baby, her head a little on one side.

There was nothing I could do about it, so I went on with my needlework, in a very bad light, and waited for her to wake up. After a decent interval the steward came to collect the glasses, glanced once at her, and affected not to notice anything. But he lingered, balancing his tray—it was not a busy trip—while we exchanged ship's rumours and personal premonitions, with an ear on the radio which was due to begin soon. The steward's viewpoint was, without attempting his accent or including my occasional subtle prods:

"I don't mind so much for myself—I'd be off tomorrow if it comes to that again—of course I'm due for shore leave this trip—that is, I am if I'm not in uniform as soon as I set foot in Liverpool—it was like that the last time—oh, yes, I was in France about a fortnight after the day I left

the ship in August, 1914, and not even time to see the Old People—I don't mind for myself, I was all through the last war—oh, yes, us reservists, you know, I saw every front we had before it finished—I don't mind, that's to say, I got no one now, I can take it—if it comes—but it's the children and all—*they'll* get it worst this time. . . ."

At some time during our quiet talk Jeanie came awake, as suddenly and completely as a baby, and as sober as a judge. We all ignored the fact that she had not been with us all along.

Then, with its usual brisk "This is London calling," the BBC news broadcast began. That night events had taken one of those small turns for the worse which kept on happening all through those anxious weeks whenever we had just begun to breathe again. Once the steward caught my eyes and shook his head—only the slightest movement of his chin it was, but it said a good deal. Before the dry, careful voice of the announcer came to its good-night, the lift-man was standing just outside the door of his car, listening. Otherwise the lounge was empty, the music had stopped, the bar was closed, the lights were dimming.

Soon we said a subdued good-night ourselves and went away down the broad stairs. I looked back. The steward was swabbing off a table and straightening chairs which were already in place. The lift-man, thin and bony and any age at all, sat slumped on the arm of a chair near his car, staring blindly at the radio, which had gone dead for the night.

The wait at Cherbourg always frets me, and this time I was especially restless, as though the tension from the Continent crept in like a fog over the rail of the ship while she lay off the low, green, rounded coastline of France. England would be all right when we got there, though. England

never jittered. My mind tugged the boat ahead across the Channel like an eager terrier on a lead. We were due at Southampton in the early afternoon. . . .

When lunch time came I was watching the Isle of Wight detach itself from the Hampshire shore. I had that feeling in the pit of my stomach that comes just before the kick-off of the Army-Navy football game, and just before a gangway goes down. Sailings are always sad, landings are always exciting. Travel is as simple as that for me. Whichever direction I have started in, I am always more than pleased to arrive. On the brink of each of my summers in England, I have felt the way a properly indulged child feels on Christmas Eve. Past benefits cast a dazzle over the treat to come. Suppose I have arranged to stay two months in England—sixty days—sixty presents from Santa Claus under the tree, each one tied up in a gay red ribbon.

The first time I came to England, I was thinking as I went reluctantly down to lunch, we landed at Plymouth. It was a slower boat, but the trip seems shorter without the stop at a French port. The first time I came to England ten years ago I was not alone and it had been an entirely hilarious voyage. We played deck games and won the pingpong tournament and did crossword puzzles in the lounge after dinner, ten years ago. We came up the Channel on an afternoon in April, 1928, with sunlight dancing on blue water and each little boat we passed had a bone in her teeth. White gulls screamed overhead. England looked very green and tidy as I stood at the rail, and the man beside me—we had not been married very long—perceived that if he made me speak I must choke, and so kept silence himself. He must have had thoughts of his own, for it was his first sight of

England since the war. And in 1928 we thought the war was over. . . .

By the time I had lunched and tipped and come on deck again we were between the Isle of Wight and the Port of Southampton. For a moment I was turned round and hardly knew which was which. The day had gone grey and chilly, and the water was unattractive, and the sky was full of planes. I couldn't remember any planes at Plymouth ten years ago; only bits of the Fleet at anchor, small trim grey bits with absurd names like Heliotrope.

I looked up at the planes, which were flying very low, and took note of the marks on their wings. Circles within circles, on their wings. They flew so low. One felt so *visible*. Suppose they had had the wrong marks on their wings. One thought of Spain. One could conceive the impulse to duck.

Centuries ago the French idea of a picnic was to come over and burn Southampton and get away again. England was an island then, I thought, watching the planes overhead. Once Caesar had tried to take possession of it with eighty ships, and failed. He tried again the next year with eight hundred—and failed again. It was another hundred years before the Romans established themselves in England. When they had gone, the largest Danish invasion of the island was made with about four hundred ships. William the Norman had had about six hundred. The Spanish Armada had numbered a hundred proud galleons, and they were not enough. But nowadays we counted planes in thousands. . . .

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1938 we were to hear rather a lot about unpreparedness in England. But the letters of Drake and Howard to Walsingham and the Queen during the months just preceding the actual arrival of the

Armada in the Channel in 1588 are enough to break your heart. They make the peevish heckling of the twentieth century Opposition leaders sound like the twittering of sparrows round a drain. These men were not the Opposition—Elizabeth had none, as such—but they were fighting for England's life with their hands tied by governmental incompetence, parsimony, red tape, and indecision fit to drive them out of their minds. Elizabeth persisted in negotiating for peace, even when the whole world knew that Spain was arming night and day to invade England. She did not like what her councillors said to her, and so she shut them out and would not see them. In December, 1587, she ordered the men paid off and the fleet laid up at Chatham. The only ships left in fighting condition were those belonging to the adventurers. And so—

"We are like bears tied to a stake; the Spaniards may come and worry us like dogs, and we cannot hurt them," raged the Lord Admiral's busy quill.

"We are wasting money, wasting strength, dishonouring and discrediting ourselves by our uncertain dallying," wrote Hawkins desperately.

Leicester groaned that the Queen was "treating for peace disarmed."

Walsingham was in complete agreement: "I see no disposition in her Majesty to take a thorough course—a manner of proceeding we hold in all our actions, both at home and abroad, which breedeth both danger and dishonour."

It all had a very familiar sound in the dark autumn of 1938.

Still, there were no stampings out of the Cabinet in self-

righteous dudgeon when Elizabeth was Queen; no high-minded resignations from the Front Bench because of "disagreement with the Governmental policy," no sniping at the Government from the safe tree-tops of a northern constituency. They were men in those days, men who held their ground before a royal termagant far more frustrating than any Conservative Prime Minister, a mercurial woman with the power of life and death in her signature. They had to do their job with whatever tools they could lay their hands on, even if it meant dipping into their own pockets, and they knew they had to win. Life was simpler in England when the Tower of London was still open as a residence for over-opinionated politicians. Simpler, and in some ways more dignified.

I think after all it can hardly come amiss in the times in which we find ourselves to take a quick look round at the situation in 1588, when the Spanish octopus had assimilated most of Europe, and England was nearer to being invaded than she had been for five hundred and twenty-two years, or would be again for another three hundred and fifty. I cannot hope to improve on Froude hereabouts, and so I give his own words:

"A combination of curious circumstances, assisted by four and twenty miles of water, had protected England hitherto from sharing the miseries of the rest of Europe. . . . Thirty years of peace were supposed to have emasculated the once warlike English nation, and to have so enamoured the people of quiet, that they had no longer the energy to defend their own firesides. If their vigour was unimpaired, it was held certainly that they must want skill and experience, and ardent Catholic Europe expected confidently that in collision

with the trained regiments of Spain or France, the English militia would break in pieces at the first encounter. . . . On the sea, they were acknowledged to be still dangerous. The general impression, however, was that if the naval defences could be pierced, and a well-found army thrown on shore in any part of the kingdom, the power of England would collapse in ruins."

The same general impression has prevailed at least once in each century ever since, but the last time it worked was in 1066, at which time a Norman "fifth column" was already established at Court.

Spain was the bogeyman of Europe in 1588—Spain ruled by a Hapsburg. In 1805 they frightened little children by threatening them with Bonaparte. In 1914 the Kaiser Wilhelm menace culminated. In 1928 it might have been Russia. In 1938—we were full of bogeymen. But looking back down the centuries, one perceived an odd sameness of pattern: it was always Jack who killed the Giant.

"Fee, fi, fo, fum,
I smell the blood of an English-*mun*—"

But somehow the Giant never won, and Jack always got home safe to his mother.

Drake survived the Armada to become M.P. for his native Plymouth. Marlborough built a ducal palace in Oxfordshire to commemorate his victory at Blenheim. Wellington returned from Waterloo to become Prime Minister. Haig died peacefully at Bemersyde. Baden-Powell is still going strong, forty years after Mafeking. It bears thinking of.

✦

(In case anyone is wondering when I am going to catch up with myself and go on about August, 1938, the answer is, Eventually. I shall put it all down when I come to it, all that happened to me in England during those grim days when what there was left of the peace of the world hung by a thread. But I won't be hustled. One of my reasons for writing this book at all is to recapture if I can that sense of infinite leisure, of spiritual browsing, which has been mine in England in the past decade of summers. So if you are in a hurry, this is the wrong place for you. This is a book about England, not about England in 1938-40. And it's going to be a cheerful book on the whole, because England has had on the whole a comparatively cheerful history, without an Alva or a Robespierre or a Frederick the Great or an Ivan the Terrible to soak its pages in blood. I warn you, I am going back to pre-Roman Britain before I come to Danzig. If anyone doesn't like the prospect, he had better leave now.)

✦

There was feverish buying of London papers while we waited to disembark at Southampton in 1938, and the news was no better.

The Englishman who had driven down from London to meet me looked completely normal, and I caught myself watching his face for reassurance. I had only half expected him anyway, from a casual sentence in a letter received before I sailed, but now I realized that if he had not come I should have laid it somehow to the European situation and not to the weather or car trouble or his own personal engagements.

"Well, we're not at war yet," he said cheerfully, though

with the slightest stress on the last word, as we shook hands. And then, lest his greeting might seem to me a trifle grim—"I've got the car here. We'll have tea at Winchester."

The words sank into my mind like a pebble into a pool, sending out widening ripples of satisfaction. Tea at Winchester. In the glassed-in place at the George. Tea. Thin brown bread-and-butter. Strawberry jam. All was right with the world.

Big black headlines showed on the folded copy of the *Evening News* in his left hand as he helped me to collect my luggage on the dock.

My first sight of Southampton had come in the year when I saw a still very recent husband off for America alone, while I remained another month in England to finish some reading at the British Museum. Southampton cannot be blamed for not standing up to it altogether.

After his boat had sailed I lunched alone at the Dolphin in the High Street, and it was one of the few thoroughly tasteless meals I have ever had in England. The Dolphin is a charming place, I have since discovered, with an upstairs lounge full of chintz and little tables and sunny windows. That day, at the table next to mine in the dining-room there was a big blond woman in a pale blue lace blouse with long sleeves over plump arms, and a bright blue hat. She was forty, and she would soon be fat, and I think she had once been a bar-maid. The man of her choice sat opposite her, bald and florid and beery, with his napkin tucked into the front of his waistcoat, making noises over the soup. But she was content. It beamed from every pore. They suited each other, they were on holiday, she was wearing her best, and looked very nice too, though it would never occur to him to say so. I'm afraid I stared. She was so content.

I had allowed myself time to see Southampton before the afternoon train to London, and much as I regretted it before that lonely luncheon was over, I set out. The handsomest bobby in England is kept underneath the Bar Gate in the High Street, where a little tram line runs. I have always meant to go back and look at him again.

"Hampton, in the days of yore,
The lawful pride of all the southern shore,"

says Speed.

The town was old when Canute the Dane came there in 1015. Canute was then twenty-one, a finely grown man with a high nose and piercing eyes. His mother was a Polish princess. He had been two years in England, fighting in his father's victorious army in the North. Even London had submitted to Sweyne, his father, and given hostages. Ethelred the Unready (which means "the counsel-less"—from "rede"—and not "the unprepared"), King of Wessex, fled to Normandy; his wife Emma was sister to the Norman Duke. But Sweyne died suddenly, and the Danish fleet elected young Canute King of England. Ethelred returned and raised an army against him, whereupon Canute cut off the hands, ears, and noses of the English hostages and set them ashore from his boats at Sandwich. Ethelred took to his bed, a very sick man, and Canute swept through England, ravaging Warwickshire as he went. Ethelred died, and the Wessex nobles met at Southampton to make hasty submission to Canute, at twenty-one. Simultaneously, London declared for the dead King's son by his Saxon first wife. This prince, the gallant Edmund Ironsides, was older than Canute and an experienced warrior. There were two more

years of bitter fighting, followed by Edmund's mysterious death, before Canute became master of England.

He was a remarkably good king, nearly as good as Alfred, one of the best of any time. After so stormy a youth, full of battle and sudden death, he settled down very quickly into a devout and just ruler. He built churches on all his old battlefields. His table of laws opens with the command that men "should ever love and worship one God, and love King Canute with right truthfulness"; Sundays must be strictly observed—in the 1020's!—and church dues promptly paid; "and I will that every man be entitled to his hunting in wood and in field on his own possessions; and let everyone forego my hunting. Beware where I will have it untrespassed on under penalty of full wite [a fine]."

During his reign England had eighteen years of peace and law and order. He loved minstrelsy, and made poets welcome at his Court. He was even inspired to compose a song himself, one verse of which has been preserved in the "Historia Eliensis." Would you like it in the original?

"Merie sungen the muneches binnen Ely
Tha Cnut Ching rew there by:
Roweth, cnihtes, noer the lant,
And here we thes muneches saeng."

Or, if you prefer:

"Cheerful sang the monks in Ely,
As Cnut the King rowed by.
Row to the shore, lads, said the King,
And let us hear the Churchmen sing."

His Anglification was sudden and complete. From the beginning he had the expressed intention of ruling England by and for the English. First of all, he levied a heavy

Danegeld, and used it to pay off his Danish forces and send them home, retaining only a few ships for his own use. He gave preferment to Englishmen of talent, and dealt ruthlessly with those of his own countrymen who objected.

England was his home. By 1030 he had made it the seat of a mighty northern empire which embraced Denmark, Norway, part of Sweden, and a year later Scotland, as vassal kingdoms. He had already had an English mistress, and he married Norman Emma, widow of Ethelred, mother of the boy who was to become Edward the Confessor. Emma was Ethelred's second wife, and she had never loved him, nor her sons by him. She was older than Canute, but very beautiful—"the gem of Normandy." After she became Canute's queen her first marriage was tactfully ignored by courtiers and chroniclers who wished to be popular. She bore Canute a son, Harthacanute, who could not hold England when his father died, and who left no heirs.

The most constant element in the many versions of Canute's famous seashore scene is the obvious fact that the waves took no heed of him. It might have happened almost anywhere. Southampton claims it, Bosham in Sussex, even the Thames at Westminster has been named as the site. Most of us have a mental image of a fine bearded man, wearing a long robe and a crown, seated in a throne-like chair on the beach; and after some trouble I have found the book that most of us read, never mind how many years ago. It went like this:

". . . The great men and of-fi-cers who were around King Canute were always praising him.

'You are the great-est man that ever lived,' one would say.

Then an-oth-er would say, 'O King! there can never be an-oth-er man as mighty as you!'

And another would say, 'Great Canute, there is nothing in the world that dares to dis-o-bey you.'

The King was a man of sense, and he grew very tired of hearing such foolish speeches.

One day he was by the seashore, and his of-fi-cers were with him. They were praising him as they were in the habit of doing. He thought that now he would teach them a lesson, and so he bade them set his chair on the beach close by the edge of the water.

'Am I the greatest man in the world?' he asked.

'O King!' they cried. 'There is no one so mighty as you!'

'Do all things obey me?' he asked.

'There is nothing that dares to dis-o-bey you, O King!' they said. 'The world bows before you, and gives you honor.'

'Will the sea obey me?' he asked, and he looked down at the little waves which were lapping the sand at his feet.

The foolish officers were puzzled, but they did not dare to say 'No.'

'Command it, O King, and it will obey,' said one.

'Sea,' cried Canute, 'I command you to come no further! Waves, stop your rolling, and do not dare to touch my feet!'

But the tide came in, just as it always did. The water rose higher and higher. It came up around the King's chair, and wet not only his feet, but also his robe. His officers stood about him, alarmed, and won-der-ing whether he was not mad. . . ."

No, not Canute, as he demonstrated to them by his next words. But it sets one won-der-ing if an enforced visit to the seashore and a similar demonstration of human impo-

tence might have proved educational to you-know-who. I mean whom.

The seashore story is not in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. It originates with Henry of Huntington, a churchman who wrote almost within living memory of Canute himself. And Henry does not say that the scene took place at Southampton, nor does he give a date, nor does he represent Canute as staging the incident in the form of a rebuke to flattering courtiers. These are all accretions. Henry leaves us to assume that it was a little experiment of Canute's own, though he does not neglect to point the moral:

"The tide, however, dashed over his feet and legs, without respect to his royal person. Then the King leaped backwards, saying: 'Let all men know how empty and worthless is the power of kings, for there is none worthy of the name but Him whom heaven, earth, and sea obey by eternal laws.' From henceforth King Canute never wore his crown of gold, but placed it for a lasting memorial on the image of our Lord affixed to a Cross, to the honour of God Almighty King: through whose mercy may the soul of Canute, the King, enjoy everlasting rest."

Canute was barely forty when he died, at Shaftesbury in 1035, and his body was taken to Winchester for burial. There is an ancient house at the end of the High Street in Southampton which still bears his name and a nine-hundred-years-old association with his presence. Canute Road now leads down to the docks. And so his tremendous vitality and love for his adopted country live on.

Two hundred years before the *Queen Mary* was even a blueprint, Defoe in his "Tour of England and Wales" wrote

what he probably thought was Southampton's epitaph, as follows:

"Southampton is a truly antient town, for 'tis in a manner dying with age; the decay of the trade is the real decay of the town; and all the business of the moment that is transacted there is the trade between us and the Island of Jersey and Guernsey, with a little of the wine trade, and much smuggling. The building of ships also is much stop'd of late; however the town is large, and has many people in it, a noble fair High-Street, a spacious key; and if its trade should revive, is able to entertain great numbers of people. There is a French church, and no inconsiderable congregation, which was a help to the town, and there are still some merchants who trade to Newfoundland, and to the Streights with fish; but for all other trade, it may be said of Southampton as of other towns, London has eaten it all up. The situation of the town between the two rivers was to its advantage formerly in point of strength, and the town was wall'd with a very strong wall, strengthen'd with a rampart, and a double ditch; but I don't hear that they ever were put to make much use of them."

The walls, Mr. Defoe, were strengthen'd against the French at the beginning of the Hundred Years' War—too late to save the town from a Sunday morning raid by fifty galleys from France, Spain, and Genoa in October, 1338, when "having slain all who opposed them, they entered and plundered the town and afterwards destroyed the greatest part of it by fire; many of the principal inhabitants were at the same time inhumanly put to death." And the walls, Mr. Defoe, were all that saved the town from similar havoc

in another attack by the French in 1432, the year after Joan of Arc's martyrdom.

A handsome roadway runs between the walls and the water's edge now, and it is possible to see even from a taxi-cab how round-topped Norman arches were set to re-enforce the masonry on the seaward side. But when Jane Austen and her mother and sister Cassandra came to live in Castle Square in 1806 the water lapped at the base of the stone, below their garden. Her nephew, in breaking what has been called "the determined reticence of her relatives" with a Memoir, has left this record of the little establishment he visited as a boy:

"My grandmother's house had a pleasant garden, bounded on one side by the old city walls; the top of this wall was sufficiently wide to afford a walk, with an extensive view, easily accessible to ladies by steps. . . . At that time Castle Square was occupied by a fantastic edifice, too large for the space in which it stood, though too small to accord well with its castellated style, erected by the second Marquis of Lansdowne, half-brother to the well-known statesman, who succeeded him in the title. The Marchioness had a light phaeton, drawn by six, and sometimes by eight little ponies, each pair decreasing in size, and becoming lighter in colour, through all the grades of dark brown, light brown, bay, and chestnut, as it was placed farther away from the carriage. The two leading pairs were managed by two boyish postillions, the two pairs nearest the carriage were driven in hand. It was a delight to me to look down from the window and see this fairy equipage put together; for the premises of the castle were so contracted that the whole process went on in the little space that remained of the open square. Like

other fairy works, however, it all proved evanescent. Not only carriage and ponies, but castle itself, soon vanished away, 'like the baseless fabric of a vision.' On the death of the Marquis in 1809, the castle was pulled down. Few probably remember its existence; and any one who might visit the place now would wonder how it ever could have stood there."

Jane was thirty-one, and had not yet had a book published. "Northanger Abbey" had been sold for £10 to a Bath bookseller, who had shelved the MS, fearing the book would fail. "Sense and Sensibility" and "Pride and Prejudice" had both been written, but would not be published for another five years. There is no evidence that she did much writing while she was living in Southampton, though "Emma" was apparently begun.

It was a large, affectionate family, and not so exclusive but that it made its brothers' wives welcome. Their father was the rector of Steventon, a plain little village in a plain part of Hampshire. Their mother was a charming if somewhat caustic creature. James, Edward, Henry, Cassandra, and Francis were all older than Jane. Charles was the baby. James was a born rector, and succeeded his father at Steventon. Edward was a born country gentleman, and became the protégé and adopted heir of a wealthy childless couple named Knight who lived at nearby Godmersham. Henry, the least stable, began in the militia, then turned banker, and finally took orders. Cassandra, three years older than Jane, was her lifelong idol. They always shared the same bedroom, and wrote each other long, amusing letters if separated only a few days. Francis, the most distinguished, was

in the Navy, at this time a commander, later to become an admiral and die at ninety-one, having outlived Jane by nearly fifty years. Baby Charles was also in the Navy, but saw most of his service in foreign waters, and married the daughter of the attorney-general at Bermuda.

They had left James in charge at Steventon and gone to make a permanent home in Bath in 1801, and the rector died there very suddenly, leaving his wife and two daughters in what was genteelly known as straitened circumstances. For a year or so they drifted and paid visits. Meanwhile brother Frank had got some shore leave and married Mary Gibson, who had been engaged to him for two anxious years while he served under Nelson. He looked forward now to being stationed at Southampton for a while, and by pooling her resources with his pay his mother was able to establish a household in Castle Square, which was to include Frank and his new wife, Cassandra, Jane, and a girl named Martha Lloyd who had lived with them off and on since her father's death at Steventon. A certain piquancy attaches to this situation when one finds that Cassandra and Jane had always *hoped* that Frank would marry Martha, though Mary became their favourite sister-in-law. A further something-or-other ensues when one goes on to learn that after Mary's death Martha became Frank's second wife.

Jane and her mother and Martha, Frank and Mary, were living in lodgings and Cassandra was visiting at Godmersham with Edward and his wife while the house in Castle Square was being got ready. And so we have Jane's letters, with their touching revelations of the economies as to carpets and furniture which had to be practiced in setting up the new home:

"Our garden is putting in order by a man who bears a remarkably good character, has a very fine complexion, and asks something less than the first. The shrubs which border the gravel walk, he says, are only sweet-briar and roses, and the latter of an indifferent sort; so we mean to get a few of the better kind therefore, and at my own particular desire he procures us some syringas. I could not do without a syringa, for the sake of Cowper's line.[1] We talk also of a laburnum. The border under the terrace is clearing away to receive currant and gooseberry bushes, and a spot is found very suitable for raspberries.

"The alterations and improvements within doors too, advance very properly, and the offices will be made very convenient indeed. Our dressing-table is constructing on the spot out of a large kitchen table belonging to the house, for doing which we have the permission of Mr. Husket, Lord Lansdowne's painter—domestic painter, I should call him, for he lives in the castle. Domestic chaplains have given way to this more necessary office, and I suppose whenever the walls want no touching up he is employed about my lady's face. . . .

"Frank has got a very bad cough, for an Austen; but it does not disable him from making very nice fringe for the drawing-room curtains. . . .

"We hear that we are envied our house by many people, and that the garden is the best in town. There will be green baize enough for Martha's room and ours, not to cover them, but to lie over the part where it is most wanted, under the dressing-table. Mary is to have a piece of carpeting for the

[1] From "The Task"—

"Laburnum rich
In streaming gold; syringa, ivory pure."

same purpose; my mother says she does not want any, and it may certainly be better done without in her rooms than in Martha's and ours, from the difference of their aspect."

After nearly three years in Southampton, the death of her brother Edward's wife, which left him with eleven children, decided them to accept his offer of a house at Chawton, in order to be near him and his family. Cassandra was with him at Godmersham before his wife died, and Jane wrote regularly during the weeks before she and her mother joined them there.

"Your silence on the subject of our ball makes me suppose your curiosity too great for words. We were very well entertained, and could have stayed longer but for the arrival of my list shoes to convey me home, and I did not like to keep them waiting in the cold. The room was tolerably full, and the ball opened by Miss Glyn. The Miss Lances had partners, Captain D'Auvergne's friend appeared in regimentals, Caroline Maitland had an officer to flirt with, and Mr. John Harrison was deputed by Captain Smith, being himself absent, to ask me to dance. Everything went very well, you see, especially after we had tucked Mrs. Lance's neckerchief in behind and fastened it with a pin."

Jane was the girl who found "writing stories a great amusement," which leaves those of us who find writing anything labour in every sense of the word divided between envy and exasperation. The Dictionary of National Biography labels her humour "subsatirical," which seems to be the exact word we have all been feeling for to describe it. In reading her letters one must watch her closely or half the

things which made Cassandra smile will slip by behind the straight face Jane's pages always wear.

She did most of her story-writing at a desk in the family living-room, with the to-and-fro of a casual, talkative family life going on all round her. She could look up from the page to discuss anything from Cassandra's embroidery stitch to the health of Edward's youngest with complete serenity, and resume her train of thought without scratching out a line.

It is strange nowadays to think of Southampton as a watering-place where people went for a rest and a cure, but so it was, and so it remained until the coming of the railway in 1840. The docks were built soon after, and the P. and O. first set the fashion for passenger lines to disembark there. These days it is mainly a place which people pass through on the way to somewhere else.

After that hot, unnatural voyage in 1938, with the long shadow of a man named Henlein across it, driving off into the English countryside was like waking from a nightmare.

The landscape between Southampton and Winchester makes no effort to be picturesque. It is an entirely utilitarian landscape, with—for England—ordinary green fields and plumy trees, and a more than ordinary scatter of wayside building. Not by any means England at its best. But the first miles of those green fields and trees and villages dotted with small bright gardens resembled the first minutes of returning consciousness when the shape of the curtain and the bulk of the bureau and all the reassuring, familiar outlines of the bedroom come into focus to comfort a mind dazed by a bad dream.

Each year when I arrive I settle into England with a long breath of contentment, as one fits a weary frame into a fa-

vourite chair. This time my appreciation was sharpened by a new sort of relief. The *Evening News* was buried under my suitcases in the back of the car. There was no tension here, in the smoothly running little motor, or its hatless, relaxed driver and his normal shop-talk; no more planes now, no lorries, no signs of troops, of course, no anxiety on the faces of the people along the road; no slightest deviation from the usual. Newspapers? Radio? Ah, no, look about you. There was no shadow over Winchester. I began to want my tea.

Winchester was Arthur's own, and Alfred's, and the Conqueror's. The treasury used to be there, and the coronations. Royal babies were born there, to give them a good start in the hearts of the people. It owns my favourite cathedral, and one of my favourite inns.

I include Arthur in spite of various dissenting voices which insist that there was another Winchester—or Caer Gwent—in Monmouthshire, where Arthur lived; and in spite of my own guilty knowledge that so much of his history does lie further west at Tintagel and at Camelford (which may have been Camelot) and at Avalon (which is Glastonbury). But for at least six hundred years Winchester has been under the impression that it owns the Round Table, and that is a fairly hardy misapprehension.

Defoe, always a sceptic, won't give us an inch here:

"At the west gate of this city was anciently a castle, known to be so by the ruins, more than by any extraordinary notice taken of it in history: What they say of it, that the Saxon kings kept their court here, is doubtful, and must be meant of the West Saxons only; and as to the tale of King Arthur's round table, which, they pretend, was kept here

for him, and his two dozens of knights; which table hangs up still, as a piece of antiquity, to the tune of 1200 years, and has, as they pretend, the names of the said knights in Saxon characters, and yet such as no man can read; All this story I see so little ground to give the least credit to, that I look upon it, and 't shall please you, to be no better than a FIBB."

Legless now, the Table hangs flat against the wall in the Great Hall which is all that is left intact of William the Conqueror's palace, where English Parliaments sat for about four hundred years, until London became the capital city. It hangs at the western end above the dais, near the hole in the wall known as the king's ear—or, if you want to be technical, the perthisis—which enabled him to overhear from his private apartments what was going on in the Hall without troubling to go down. And it has hung there at the end of a long vista of dark Purbeck marble columns for a long time.

In 1378 the rhyming chronicler John Hardynge wrote:

> "The rounde Table of Wynchester beganne
> And there it ended and there it hangeth yet."

There are those who find fault with the exterior of Winchester Cathedral. They call the West Front "disappointing" and the tower "dumpy." Defoe complains that "the outside of the church is as plain and course, as if the founders had abhorr'd ornaments, or at least that William of Wickham had been a Quaker, or at least a Quietist; There is neither statue, nor a nich for a statue, to be seen on all the outside; no carv'd work, no spires, towers, pinacles, balustrades, or any thing; but meer walls, buttresses, windows, and coins,

necessary to support and order of the building: It has no steeple but a short tower cover'd flat, as if the top of it had fallen down, and it had been cover'd in haste to keep the rain out, till they had time to build it up again."

I call that very unreasonable. It hasn't the piled-up glory of York, no, nor the slender female grace of Salisbury. But it is comforting, and dependable, and eternal, and grand. The great West Window which faces the lime avenue is made up of countless bits of the 14th century glass which was shattered by the Cromwellian army in an orgy of destruction when even the stone carvings on the chantry canopies were stove in by musket-butts, the shrine of St. Swithin was stripped, and the statues on the reredos were pulled down and smashed. Those million minute jewels of broken glass were patiently scraped up out of the dirt and placed together in a rich mosaic without a pattern, specks of living colour as you stand below it looking up. The leading is a miracle of intricacy. And even from the outside, surely you can sense the sweep and height of the longest nave in Christendom—so tall as to seem narrow, so long as almost to reach its vanishing point.

There was a large American encampment at Winchester in 1918, and the impact of the ebullient doughboys on a town which celebrated the 1000th birthday of its civic institutions before any of them was born resulted in divers legends which may endure for another thousand years. I was told one version of the story of the Cathedral key by an entirely responsible man at a formal dinner party before the champagne went round. He saw it happen, because he was one of the American officers in charge of the Winchester camp at the time. The Cathedral key, he said, was nearly a foot long, and had been left in the West door from opening

time till closing time each day, by generations of vergers. During 1918 a southern regiment stationed at Winchester on its way from America to France had been confined to barracks for misdemeanors in conjunction with a rival regiment—I think there was a free-for-all in the High Street—and at the last minute before shipping them off to France it was decided by the benevolent authorities to allow the boys to see the Cathedral. They were accordingly conducted through it in squads, and then entrained for Southampton. That night when the verger went to lock up, no key was in the door. There was consternation and profanity at the Cathedral and the American headquarters respectively. The American cross-Channel chat by wire was specific and vigorous. As the boys came off the boat on the French side they were lined up and addressed by their commanding officer, who said that if the man who had pinched the key would stand forward at once the consequences would not be dire. Otherwise—. Nobody moved. And so one comes to the hilarious mental picture of that entire regiment being frisked by its officers until the key was found—tied round the neck of a boy from Alabama. Since when the vergers are said to sleep with it under their pillows.

We parked the car behind the Cathedral and crossed the High Street to the George, on that cool, sunless afternoon in 1938. The George shows its 18th century vintage in its name. But there has been a hostelry on its site since the beginning of Winchester time. When Elizabeth was Queen it was called the Moon, and the charge for a featherbed for one night was a penny. Dinner was sixpence, whether you had "beef, mutton, pigge, or fish." During Charles II's reign the rooms were named instead of numbered—except one, which was known simply as "the room next the Beer

Cellar." What used to be the courtyard of the present building, where the coaches drove in, has been glassed over, and offices have been built between it and the High Street, so that you come through a narrow dark entry into a sort of conservatory with ferns and ivy in pots, geraniums in window-boxes, wicker furniture, and carpeted white-painted stairs rising to a balustraded gallery at the far end. Tea is served here in the afternoon, and coffee at eleven a.m. and after dinner. It is a familiar enough pattern for rebuilt inns in England, and the place is not attractively lighted at night, but for some reason that I can never put my finger on it is to me a singularly enchanting lounge, and I behold it each time with a familiar throb of pleasure. Once when I sat there after dinner a few years ago, a young officer from the barracks had brought his best girl in for coffee, and pled his cause for a solid hour right under my nose, with a concentration and singleness of purpose which I have never seen anywhere else. His tweed-clad maiden was gently obdurate, with downcast eyes and big red hands which lay awkwardly in her lap. She hardly spoke at all, and yet he seemed to make very little headway. I had to catch a train before she said Yes.

Once again, in 1938, I looked about me gratefully and sank into a wicker chair. There was an elderly couple in a far corner, and that was all. The leisurely, effortless conversation of a friendship which fits like a well-worn glove rambled along above our teacups. The brown bread-and-butter —Hovis—was fresh, thin, and delicious. The jam was plentiful. The cakes were not so fresh, and most of them were covered with an aggressive sort of icing, and that too was entirely normal and in character for wayside teas. The tea was hot and strong, out of the usual smooth metal pots,

much polished. There were, of course, no napkins, not even paper ones. The English never seem to lick their fingers at tea, but Americans have to, while fumbling left-handedly for a handkerchief to wipe on.

We returned to the dark archway which opens off the High Street on to the simple precincts, so unpretentious here, so unlike Salisbury or Wells, where the effect is almost blinding in its theatrical perfection. I cast a no doubt wistful glance at my companion.

"Could we go inside?" I said.

"Inside?" (We had only just come out of the inn.)

"The Cathedral."

"Oh." He glanced at his watch, but not as though it really mattered much.

"Must you be back in Town at any special time?" I asked.

"No—nothing special."

We followed the iron railings round to the entrance. The lovely avenue of limes stretched away behind, an arch of interlocking green.

There never seems to be much of anybody in Winchester Cathedral. Little knots of people go round occasionally with the verger, as I have done myself, more than once, though the vergers let you alone if you prefer it. But always when you go in the door and pause at the end of that breath-taking nave you are—or seem to be—alone.

For a moment I cast about rather aimlessly. There was no leisure today to sit down on the end chair and let the place soak into my bones as I like to do, especially if the organist happens to be practicing. And there was no real sense in setting out on a tour of the tombs and chantries, which we both knew already by heart. And yet I couldn't leave.

Again I glanced at the patient Englishman beside me. Hatless, clad in an old brown suède jacket and grey flannel bags, he stood quietly in all that vast beauty, looking at home there, at his ease—like all his countrymen, secure in his accustomed heritage of just such dignity and peace. Few places in England are new to him, for his boyhood was spent in theatrical touring companies, and young actors fifteen years ago covered a lot of ground. Often he has shown me things—me, the so-called scholar—for which I have been grateful, and which I might otherwise have missed. And at that moment I was glad of his unemphatic presence, because my heart was choking me.

"Let's go and find Jane," I said at last.

"Who?" He brought his eyes back from the vaulting overhead.

"Jane Austen."

"Oh, yes." He is never in a hurry.

We both turned without hesitation to the left. And so I stood again above the plain stone slab in the floor of the north aisle, looking down at her name. Last time there had been a bunch of garden flowers, tied too tightly, laid across her name. The verger said once that hardly a day went by in summer that someone didn't bring her flowers. But there were none today. What a self-contained little genius it was, we said, as we stood there. She herself spoke of the "little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush as produces little effect after much labour." Her writing lifetime covered the French Revolution, the Peninsular War, Trafalgar, and Waterloo, but not one word of all that stress and strain crept into her novels. There were soldiers and sailors a-plenty among her characters, but they were all safe at Bath or Lyme Regis, cutting a dash in their

regimentals. The guns of Waterloo were not audible in Hampshire. Napoleon's armies might march, but the Channel lay between them and gentle Jane.

We left the Cathedral and walked back to the car and drove away rather silently. I thought I knew why he had looked at his watch. There was no radio in the car, and he was thinking of the six o'clock BBC news bulletin.

My thoughts clung to Winchester as it fell behind, wrapping it round with a jealous, protecting layer of memory. It belonged to me, nothing could take it away from me, now. I would still be able to see, at ninety, looking inward, the narrow High Street with the George on one side and the tall Market Cross on the other, with the old, overhanging timbers of the Piazza beyond, and the dark, sudden archway which gave on the precincts on the right. Even if they dropped bombs on Winchester—.

Don't be morbid. That's nonsense. Think of something else. Think of Alfred. He saved it from the Danes once. And all there is of him in Winchester today is a modern statue at the foot of the High Street. Alfred, "the delight of his people and the dread of his enemies"; Alfred and the cakes. They call that a "foolish legend" now. But Asser, who was his friend and biographer, took it seriously enough:

"At the same time the above-named Alfred, King of West Saxons, with a few of his nobles, and certain soldiers and vassals, used to lead an unquiet life among the woodlands of the county of Somerset in great tribulation; for he had none of the necessaries of life, except what he could forage openly or stealthily, by frequent sallies, from the pagans, or even from the Christians who had submitted to

the rule of the pagans, and as we read in the Life of St. Neot, at the house of one of his cowherds.

"But it happened on a certain day, that the countrywoman, wife of the cowherd, was preparing some loaves to bake, and the king, sitting at the hearth, made ready his bow and arrows and other warlike instruments. The unlucky woman espying the cakes burning at the fire ran up to remove them, and rebuking the brave king, exclaimed—

'Ca'sn thee mind the ke-aks, man, an' doossen zee 'em burn? I'm boun' thee's east 'em vast enough, az soon az 'tiz the turn.' "

Alfred, who according to Asser was "the son of King Ethelwulf, who was the son of Egbert, who was the son of Elmund, who was the son of Eafa, who was the son of Eoffa, who was the son of Ingild—" and so on, straight back, biblically, through Cerdic, and Woden, and Geat ("whom the pagans long worshiped as a god"), and Shem, and Methusalem, and Seth, to Adam; Alfred, the scholar-warrior, who wrote at the end of his compilations of St. Augustine's soliloquies: "Therefore he seems to me a very foolish man, and very wretched, who will not increase his understanding while he is in the world, and ever wish and long to reach that endless life where all shall be made clear."

The details of his death are not known. He was buried at Winchester, and his tomb was noted at the time of the Dissolution, but his bones were scattered by the 18th century magistrates when digging the foundations of a new bridewell, and his coffin was used to mend an alley.

Think—while the little car runs on doggedly through the soft, damp air to London and the BBC and the Late

Night Final of the *Evening News*—think of that kindly, learned man, William of Wyckham, who rebuilt the Cathedral and founded the boys' school at the end of College Street, beyond the white house with the tablet where Jane Austen died; founded a school in 1382 on the simple precept that "Manners makyth man," cut into the edge of the wooden trencher each boy used at meals. There is another motto carved on the wall of the Schoolroom which is now used for lectures and concerts and has an organ of its own: *Aut disce*—beside a mitre and crosier, as the expected rewards of learning; *Aut discede*—beside an inkhorn and sword, the emblems of the civil and military profession; *Manet sors tertia caedi*—beside, quite simply, a rod. *Either learn—Or depart hence—Or remain and be chastised.* Currently: *Learn, leave, or be licked.*

For schoolboy generations, *"Dulce Domum"* has been "publicly sung by the Scholars and Choristers, aided by a band of music," in the College Meads beside old Izaak Walton's River Itchen at the close of the summer term. It is supposed to have been written originally, in Latin, by a homesick scholar kept at College during the vacation, and was set to music by the College organist around 1680. It's kind of pitiful, and in such a setting must catch at the heart of even the most sorely tried "beak."

"Sing a sweet melodious measure,
Waft enchanting lays around;
Home! a theme replete with pleasure!
Home! a grateful theme resound;

Chorus

Home, sweet home; an ample treasure!
Home! with ev'ry blessing crowned!

Home! perpetual source of pleasure!
Home! a noble strain resound!

Lo, the joyful hour advances,
  Happy season of delight;
Festal songs, and festal dances,
  All our tedious toils requite.

Leave, my weary'd muse, thy learning,
  Leave thy task so hard to bear;
Leave thy labour, ease returning,
  Leave thy bosom, O my care!"

And so on, for verses and verses, and with the chorus after each one, until we come to—

"O what rapture, O what blisses!
  When we gain the lovely gate;
Mother's arms and mother's kisses,
  There our blest arrival wait.

Greet our household-gods with singing;
  Lend, O Lucifer, thy ray;
Why should light so slowly springing,
  All our promised joys delay?

Chorus

Domum, domum, dulce domum,
Domum, domum, dulce domum,
Dulce, dulce, dulce domum,
Dulce domum resonemus!"

It can be seen that the author of the original Latin version had a little less ingenuity and variety than the translator. If we had known the tune, it might have helped to keep our spirits up that day on the way to London. . . .

They say the spire of the Cathedral collapsed early in the 12th century because it simply couldn't bear the fact that wicked William Rufus had been buried beneath it. And then they say that maybe the Cathedral never had a spire. And they say that the plain stone tomb in the choir probably belonged to some ordinary bishop anyhow, instead of to the bad old king—though it does seem odd that a holy man should have been huddled away in an unmarked coffin—and once I heard a verger say that when the tomb was opened a hundred years ago they found bits of leaf-mould and a sliver of rotting wood inside. . . . How did the old rhyme go, about William Rufus—Wace wrote it, and Wace was a Jersiais, and must have written in Norman French—even the translation must be very old—think, now, put your mind on something cheerful, how did the old rhyme go. . . .

"I know not who the bowstring drew—
I know not how the arrow flew—
Who bore that bow, the King who slew
I know not—but 'twas smoothly said
That Tyrrel drew, and the King lay dead. . . ."

2. *London Was Still There*

LONDON was just the same.

My usual arrival routine worked by the usual magic. A small furnished flat and morning char had been engaged by letter from the same agency in Bayswater that has looked after me for years. I don't have to go to an hotel first and inspect my flats any more. They know what I want at the agency: almost any flat in either of two big modern blocks on their books. These are equipped with automatic refrigeration, which is still the wildest sybaritism in London; a two-station radio set, plugging into either National or Regional—a fancier set which will bring in the Continental stations is charged for; electric fires; steam heat; hot water; and American bathrooms, by which is meant bathrooms built as bathrooms from the beginning with tile and modern plumbing, not a box-room or spare bedroom on to which bathroom fixtures have been appliquéd. Also included are fair, smiling cockney boys in peaked caps who do an ambling sort of porter duty until eleven p.m. when the street door is locked and thereafter you use your night-key.

Chars are extra, but the agency supplies them too. It is often the same char I had last year, or one just as good. The one I had in 1938 was the best. They come in at nine a.m., get my breakfast, clear it away, "do up" the flat, attend to laundry lists, marketing, and errands, set out a cold

lunch if desired, and are away, with a cheery "'Mornin', mum!" to get their own midday meal for the family at home. For this they expect ten shillings a week (less than $2.50) and strive diligently to please. They also receive from me a little something round the edges.

My favourite, Mrs. Richmond, whose husband is a chef, and who looks much better fed than most of them, is coy about her cooking, because she says she never gets much chance to cook at home. ("'Ere, now, Gladys, come out of it, 'oo's the cook in this family, I'd like to knaow!") That's not quite fair. Mrs. Richmond for some reason has not got the usual cockney twang, and most of her h's are in their right places, and her voice is soft. Once she said to me, out of a clear sky—"Please tell me if things aren't the way you like 'em, mum, because I want to do right." Maybe you don't believe it. I might get used to it in another ten years myself.

I puzzle them too. They are a little bewildered because I have no very strong convictions about housekeeping, so long as they make decent tea and don't burn the toast and will give me what they call "a tight bed"—and the more they let me alone and the less they say the better I like it. It fascinates them to work for a woman—and an American lady, too—a woman who sits down at a typewriter immediately after breakfast, and doesn't snoop around after them, and encourages them to take home spare bread and cake and milk. That's what they want worst—tidbits for the children at home. And who are they to know if I buy an extra threepennyworth of cakes for tea which will get stale if not used up? I'm a softie about chars. Even the inevitable one who drank was rather a dear, and did it on her own time, except for a day now and then when she didn't turn up at all. I

have had only one who wasn't a dear—a limp spinster who had "trouble with her head."

I treasure Mrs. Richmond's comment on the portrait of my husband as she dusted it: "He's got a *thinking* sort of face," she said, a little awed.

For a couple of years, back in 1929 and 1930, I lived in service flats up in the West End, which is better than living in an hotel for weeks on end, but less satisfactory and more expensive than my present system. There were no kitchens in the service flats, the meals being cooked individually downstairs and brought up on trays and served in courses. I don't like camping out for long, even in such style. I like to be able to raid my own ice-box at midnight, and to put on the kettle for tea whenever I please. In service flats, each floor has its own butler and maid—this sounds much grander than it was, really, perhaps I should call him a steward, but he did wear a stiff shirt-front to serve dinner—and you do your ordering for the day ceremoniously each morning before he clears away breakfast.

My butler was Reginald and the maid was Selina, and once, through two open windows on the court which gave a view from my bedroom into the passage by the lift, I saw Selina get kissed by the porter, and she smacked his face for him afterwards, just like on the films, and I felt I was seeing life at last. Reginald never kissed the maids, I think. He was a thin, dark, hunted-looking boy, left over from the Great War by accident. It had marked him, and very nearly killed him. I was there, of course, for Reginald's end; everything happens to me. One morning my breakfast was late, and finally arrived by the man from the floor below, a cheery ex-cavalryman. He said that Reginald had not turned up. On my way out I met the manageress and

made inquiries. She said it was his stomach, and added something vague about the War, and that he was taking a fortnight's holiday with his people in Cambridge. I asked if he needed help, and she was embarrassed—manageresses are always genteel, by main force—and said she thought they were all right.

I found, during the next few days, that I couldn't forget about Reginald. I had got fond of him subconsciously, as you get fond of strays. He became, in retrospect, infinitely pathetic. A week later while the substitute man was clearing away breakfast and I sat writing letters in the sunny window over Ryder Street, I became aware that he had paused unhappily. " 'Scuse me for speakin', madam—" I knew before I looked up that Reginald was dead. "—and I thought since you'd been interested, madam, per'aps you'd want to know we're gettin' up a little subscription for 'is family. We *thought* they was goin' on all right, you see—they've got a little public 'ouse in Cambridge, madam—but now we find it's been pretty well 'and to mouth, as you might say—"

These things get in amongst you.

I have been told by sundry pre-War gentry that now I live on the wrong side of the Park. Be that as it may, I live very comfortably, with an automatic lift, instead of climbing four flights in Chelsea to something picturesque and inconvenient with the bathtub in the kitchen. And so far as that goes, I live on the wrong side of the Park in New York too, and like it. In Bayswater it is less than five minutes from my door to the Round Pond and the Broad Walk in Kensington Gardens—Peter Pan country, also haunted by the little nursemaid's son David, who, as you will remember, was a missel-thrush before he was born.

I am of the generation which was raised on Barrie. That's

not boasting, lots of us are. Even when I was very young, Barrie did not quite "take," just as vaccinations never "took." But that is not to say that I am entirely unmoved by the associations of the Broad Walk and the Round Pond, as well as by their intrinsic beauty. Each year as I contemplate them anew I tell myself that I must have another go at "The Little White Bird." Each year I am too busy with other things. Let's look at it now. Some of it is pretty trying. The rest we will like better, at our age, than we ever did before.

"If I were to point out all the notable places as we pass up the Broad Walk, it would be time to turn back before we reach them, and I simply wave my stick at Cecco's tree, that memorable spot where a boy called Cecco lost his penny, and looking for it, found twopence. There has been a good deal of excavation going on there ever since. Farther up the walk is the little wooden house in which Marmaduke Perry hid. There is no more awful story of the Gardens by day than this of Marmaduke Perry, who had been Mary-Annish three days in succession, and was sentenced to appear in the Broad Walk dressed in his sister's clothes. He hid in the little wooden house, and refused to emerge until they brought him knickerbockers with pockets."

Eventually you come to the Round Pond.

"It is round because it is in the very middle of the Gardens, and when you are come to it you never want to go any farther. You can't be good all the time at the Round Pond, however much you try. You can be good in the Broad Walk all the time, but not at the Round Pond, and the reason is that you forget, and when you remember, you are

so wet that you might as well be wetter. There are men who sail boats on the Round Pond, such big boats that they bring them in barrows and sometimes in perambulators, and then the baby has to walk. The bow-legged children in the Gardens are these who had to walk too soon because their father needed the perambulator."

A guide-book will point out pedantically that the Round Pond is really octagonal—"an artificial basin seven acres in extent." It doesn't state how deep the water gets in the middle, but I should imagine never above the waist of a quite small boy, and the slope is very gradual, with a wide paved margin merging into a walk, and benches here and there round the edge.

All sorts and conditions of boats still sail the Pond, nearly forty years after "The Little White Bird" was written. They range from the "stick-boats" most recommended by Barrie, through little Lord Biffington's highly varnished yacht from Hamley's launched under the watchful eye of his Norland nurse, to old Mr. Sniffkins' home-made, three-foot steamboat. And on a Sunday afternoon it is not unusual to see two or three very serious grown men in waders with a miniature motor-ship, absorbed in adjusting its rudder so that it will dock at a given point on the opposite shore.

A sport of almost equal importance nowadays is dipping for tiddlers with a bit of cheesecloth bag on a pole. Tiddlers are infinitesimal minnows which appear to flourish and multiply and enjoy life in the Round Pond, though why they haven't been exterminated long since I have no idea. Perhaps a benevolent County Council stocks the place at frequent intervals. Anyway, the pole-net fishing goes on by the hour, under the noses of swans and ducks, and the mor-

tality among the tiddlers must be terrific, because you see the little boys going home in the evening with jam-pots full of water and a dozen hapless captives still very lively but surely doomed.

The Flower Walk, which must be seen to be believed, is famous for its trim nursemaids and petal-skinned English infants who simply never seem to howl, but sit angelically in decorative prams observing the scenery, or, if old enough, roll hoops, bounce balls, and converse in charming, chirping voices with broad a's. But at the other end of the Broad Walk the children from the Paddington slums come to play, and they are sorry little sights. Very early in the morning they begin to arrive—probably for the whole day if everybody at home who is old enough is out to work. They are not clean, for baths in the buildings where they live are tuppence each extra, and whether you like the idea or not, and I confess it is horrible to me, one tub of hot water does for the whole family in turn when there is a bath night. And so yesterday's tear-stains are still visible on the day before's grime, for up at this end of the Gardens people do cry, if only for weariness and a certain hollow feeling inside. Their clothes are pretty dreadful—really dirty and in rags. They never have hats, and if it is cold they are never warm enough. They come in clumps of three to six, the baby in a broken-down cart-pram, with the next youngest sitting more or less on top of him, a bottle of milk—sometimes it's only water—and a paper bag full of buns and scraps for lunch and tea crammed in at his feet. The next-youngest-but-one drags along listlessly holding to the side of the pram-handle, which is usually chest-high to the undersized child who is in charge and has to push it. It is a long trek from home. They are bound for the playground with swings

and slides and bars just inside the gate opposite Queen's Road—rather a small playground, and surprisingly peaceful and well-behaved. You are likely to miss it, as you go by along the Broad Walk. The Gardens are so large—or seem so large—that there is ample room for everybody and for all sorts.

Actually they are two hundred and seventy-five acres. And with Hyde Park which joins them on the east with only a low railing between, there are six hundred and thirty-six acres of old trees and unforbidden grass. So there is never anybody tripping over your feet, no matter where you choose to sit down. Scattered over the lawns of this free paradise are the green canvas deck-chairs which you can sit in all day long, if you have arranged not to starve to death, for tuppence. These chairs, in this city of orderly Britons, are never snitched and seldom broken. There is, of course, no charge for the benches along the walks. The tuppence? Why, you just sit down where you like, after dragging your chair to the shade of your favourite tree or to the exact angle of sunlight you prefer, and you sit there, and doze and read and smoke, and do needlework, as though in your own back garden; and eventually a man in a brown linen duster and a peaked cap, with a roll of tickets and a punch with a tiny bell, comes along, and you give him tuppence and he gives you a pink ticket and goes away. If, after several hours, another man in a brown duster comes along and looks askance, you show him your pink ticket and he puts a finger to his cap and goes away. And if you have only half an hour to spare, and the man in the duster has not come for your tuppence, you just get up and leave, and nobody cares.

After several years spent in Disraeli's spiritual company

there is a sentimental interest for me in Kensington Palace where Victoria was born. It was in her first Parliament in 1837 that he finally won his first seat; and in her old age she adored him and he flirted with her outrageously, even as Melbourne, her first Prime Minister, had done.

The Palace too is but five minutes' walk from my flat. Made of old red brick, partly Wren's, partly William Kent's, it lies towards the western end of the Gardens, beyond the playground and flanked by an exquisite little sunken garden with a pool. The dramatic scene of Victoria's accession which took place here in the June dawn cannot have escaped anyone these days. But I rather like Barrie's version of it, long before Laurence Housman:

"You now try to go to the Round Pond, but nurses hate it, because they are not really manly, and they make you look the other way, at the Big Penny and the Baby's Palace. She was the most celebrated baby of the Gardens, and lived in the palace all alone, with ever so many dolls, so people rang the bell, and up she got out of her bed, though it was past six o'clock, and she lighted a candle and opened the door in her nighty, and then they all cried with great rejoicings, 'Hail, Queen of England!' What puzzled David most was how she knew where the matches were kept. The Big Penny is a statue about her."

Victoria's own account in her diary is nearly as fantastic. Let us start two days before, and absorb the suburban routine in which she had passed her eighteen unworldly years:

"*Sunday, 18th June.*—Got up at 8. After 9 we breakfasted. The children played in the room. At 10 we went

down to prayers with dear Lehzen. The Dean read and preached. The text was from the 2nd chapter of St. John's epistle, 5th verse. Drew and painted. Mary came up with Edward and stayed some time. Edward also remained alone with me for ¼ of an hour. Painted. Saw Stockmar, who brought me a letter from Uncle Leopold!!—Painted. The poor King, they say, can live but a few hours more!—Wrote my journal.

"*Monday, 19th June.*—Got up at ¼ past 8. Read in *Les Veillées du Château* while my hair was doing. After 9 we breakfasted. The children played in the room. At ¼ p. 10 Mary, Lehzen, the children and I drove out and came home at a little after 11. Read in *Les Veillées du Château.* Wrote my journal. Saw Dr. Clark. Saw Ernest Hohenlohe who brought me the news from Windsor that the poor King was *so* ill that he could hardly live through the day. He likewise brought me a very kind message from the poor Queen, and also one from the poor old King. After 7 we dined. Saw the children before dinner for a minute. Stayed up until ¼ p. 10. Read in W. Scott's life while my hair was undoing.

"*Tuesday, 20th June.*—I was awoke at 6 o'clock by Mamma, who told me that the Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Conyngham were here, and wished to see me. I got out of bed and went into my sitting-room (only in my dressing-gown), and *alone,* and saw them. Lord Conyngham (the Lord Chamberlain) then acquainted me that my poor Uncle, the King, was no more, and had expired at 12 minutes p. 2 this morning, and consequently that I am *Queen.* Lord Conyngham knelt down and kissed my hand, at the same time delivering to me the official announcement of the poor King's demise. The Archbishop then told me

that the Queen was desirous that he should come and tell me the details of the last moments of my poor, good Uncle; he said that he had directed his mind to religion and had died in a perfectly happy, quiet state of mind, and was quite prepared for his death. He added that the King's sufferings at the last were not very great but that there was a good deal of uneasiness. Lord Conyngham, whom I charged to express my feelings of condolence and sorrow to the poor Queen, returned directly to Windsor. I then went to my room and dressed.

"Since it has pleased Providence to place me in this station, I shall do my utmost to fulfil my duty towards my country; I am very young and perhaps in many, though not in all things, inexperienced, but I am sure, that very few have more real good will and more real desire to do what is fit and right than I have.

"Breakfasted, during which time good faithful Stockmar came and talked to me. Wrote a letter to dear Uncle Leopold and a few words to dear good Feodore. Received a letter from Lord Melbourne in which he said he would wait upon me at a little before 9. At 9 came Lord Melbourne, whom I saw in my room, and of COURSE *quite* ALONE as I shall *always* do all my Ministers. He kissed my hand and I then acquainted him that it had long been my intention to retain him and the rest of the present Ministry at the head of my affairs, and that it could not be in better hands than his. He then again kissed my hand. He then read to me the Declaration which I was to read to the Council, which he wrote himself and which is a very fine one. I then talked with him some little longer time after which he left me. He was in full dress. I like him very much and feel full confidence in him. He is a very straightforward, hon-

est, clever and good man. I then wrote a letter to the Queen. At about 11 Lord Melbourne came again to me and spoke to me upon various subjects. At about ½ p. 11 I went downstairs and held a Council in the red saloon. I went in of course quite alone and remained seated the whole time. My two Uncles, the Dukes of Cumberland and Sussex, and Lord Melbourne conducted me. The declaration, the various forms, the swearing in of the Privy Councillors of which there were great numbers present, and the reception of some of the Lords of the Council in adjacent room (likewise alone) I subjoin here. I was not at all nervous and had the satisfaction of hearing that people were satisfied with what I had done and how I had done it. Receiving after this, audiences of Lord Melbourne, Lord John Russell, Lord Albemarle (Master of the Horse), and the Archbishop of Canterbury, all in my room and alone. Saw Stockmar. Saw Clark, whom I named my Physician. Saw Mary. Wrote to Uncle Ernest. Saw Ernest Hohenlohe who brought me a kind and very feeling letter from the poor Queen. I feel very much for her, and really feel that the poor good King was always kind personally to me, that I should be ungrateful were I not to recollect it and feel grieved at his death. The poor Queen is wonderfully composed now, I hear. Wrote my journal. Took my dinner upstairs alone. Went downstairs. Saw Stockmar. At about 20 minutes to 9 came Lord Melbourne and remained till near 10. I had a very important and a very *comfortable* conversation with him. Each time I see him I feel more confidence in him; I find him very kind in his manner too. Saw Stockmar. Went down and said good-night to Mamma &c. My *dear* Lehzen will ALWAYS remain with me as my friend but will take no situation about me, and I think she is right."

I would like to remind you again that she had just turned eighteen, and was barely out of the schoolroom in which Lehzen, as governess, had reigned.

In the last year of her life, Victoria made arrangements that Kensington Palace should be kept in repair, on the understanding that the State Rooms should be open to the public. You can go in on Saturdays and Sundays, admission sixpence. The King's Gallery is Wren, with Grinling Gibbons carving, and a William Kent ceiling—the latter rather overpowering. The rooms used by Victoria before her accession are shown, and contain her dolls' house and other toys, and are papered most delightfully with small, delicate designs. It is possible to feel quite neighbourly there.

So in 1938 I found London pursuing its placid summer way, unchanged by the activities of the man Henlein. But the Nuremberg Congress was opening now, and the newspapers made grim reading.

On Sunday, September 11th, it was reported that the crowds waiting in the Nuremberg streets to cheer Hitler bought their newspapers eagerly, anxious first of all to learn if they had been let in for a war yet. There were signs that for once the Nazi pageantry of force lacked charm for the little man in the street. During that week both Gayda in Rome and Goering in Nuremberg had reached a new high in non-sequiturs—Gayda with a reference to the "war-mongering pacifism of the democracies," and Goering with a statement to the effect that "a nation must have enough to eat even if a war lasts thirty years."

Prime Minister Chamberlain had come back to London from a Conservative party conference in Scotland, and resumed his morning walks in St. James's Park with his serene and lovely wife. The Cabinet was scheduled to meet

on Monday a few hours before the final Nuremberg speech, which—it was fondly hoped—would clear the air one way or the other. The Opposition was pressing for the recall of Parliament. The British Home Fleet was assembling in Scottish waters with what was termed "purely routine" neatness and despatch; and one recalled, if one was old enough, how the British Fleet by the same happy routine coincidence was placed exactly where it would do the most good in August, 1914. The Minesweeping Flotilla and the Minelaying Destroyers were known to have been put in commission, by another fortuitous accident. The French Fleet made no bones. They were concentrating at Toulon and Brest as fast as ever they could and the hell with it. The Maginot Line had been brought to wartime strength, with tanks and artillery in reserve behind it.

I had been in London during crises before. We began having them in 1931, when the Labour Government resigned and the National Government was formed.

That all started with the failure in May of an Austrian bank hardly anybody except financiers had ever heard of. (Austria, more completely crippled by the war—or by Versailles—than any other nation, was a breeding ground for every kind of trouble, including Communist and National Socialist propaganda, and France was then the dominant factor in Europe.) Germany, under Hindenburg and Bruening, was the next to sink into financial crisis and all her banks closed for a few days in July. (Hitler was just around the corner, waiting for Bruening to fail.) Sterling began to depreciate sharply, and on August 1st a big Budget deficit was forecast by the MacDonald-Snowden Labour Government. Unemployment figures in England were at record height, but nevertheless a movement was made to

reduce the dole. To this the Trades Union Council violently objected.

Crisis.

International finance is something most of us will never understand. I can only report that in the midst of a seemingly peaceful, though rather chilly August, with the whole world on holiday, everything was suddenly all wrong. MacDonald came back from Lossiemouth. Baldwin came back from Carlsbad. The King came back from Balmoral. Snowden—Arthur Henderson—Thomas—Samuel—Lansbury—there were Cabinet meetings—anxious crowds in Downing Street—anxious crowds round Buckingham Palace, where all the ministers were summoned by the King on Sunday, August 23rd.

On that Monday, for no good reason except that I felt so much tension in the air all round me that I could not settle to anything at my desk, I took a bus to Epping Forest. I had with me an old gentleman who had first come to England more than forty years before, on his honeymoon. And now, alone in the world, he still came to England almost every summer, because he loved it so—although when the very cheapest passage had been paid he never had but about tuppence-ha'penny to live on while he was there. I encouraged his company because such steadfast enterprise, especially at his age, commanded respect, and because he knew so much more than I did about so many things, and because he had a childlike capacity for wringing every drop of enjoyment out of the smallest kind of happiness—and lastly because I owed him a certain old debt of gratitude never to be sufficiently repaid. And if sometimes his diffident but obstinate demands on my time got a little tiresome, I only hope he never knew.

It was a grey, chilly day, and the bus route to Epping Forest lies through the East End along Mile End Road, which is London at its ugliest. Along the way the Lunch Edition contents-bills began to bloom outside the news agents' shops: "3 PARTY LEADERS AT PALACE," on the *News;* "GOVT RESIGN" on a *Star* Special Edition, which means Extra. After several miles of this the old gentleman who knew so many things, including Sanskrit, spoke into one of our companionable silences. "There seems to be something going on at Westminster," he observed mildly.

By the time I regained the power of speech I had decided to leave him alone on it. He didn't know. He didn't care. He was happier than the rest of us. And anyhow the Forest had begun, outside the bus windows.

So near to London as the price of a seven-penny purple ticket, Epping is therefore doubly impressive and hard to believe. It has always been a Royal Chase, and as late as 1818 there were still wild stags in it. What I saw of it that day was largely beech trees—enormous, gnarled, ancient trees right down to the edge of the wide motor road, creating even there on a sunless day an almost grotto-greenish light. We did not get out into the footpaths or glades, which are of course even lovelier. We left the bus, though, somewhere along the way, and had tea. He was always afraid of overriding his ticket (in which case an Inspector, if one had caught him, would have kindly suggested that he give up an extra penny or two, but you would have thought it meant a gaol sentence at least) and he was always ready for his tea.

By some error in judgment we found ourselves in a vast sort of pavilion with dozens of bare wooden tables and chairs, a deserted piano, and space for dancing. It stood

quite alone at some crossroads, with no village round it, and I think it was a beer palace which counted on Sundays and holidays for its trade. There was not another soul there. A rather surprised waiter in a dirty apron brought us strong hot tea, clammy bread-and-butter, and villainous iced cakes. The old gentleman, who was really an epicure about wines and coffee and such-like, tanked up contentedly on the tea, which was good, and speculated aloud about what sort of place we had got into. Perhaps he hoped it wasn't quite nice. Nothing interrupted its dreary virtue while we were there. After tea we poked about a little, not getting too far from the place where the London-bound bus would stop, and it was all very chilly and autumnal, and we were both glad to start home again.

Soon—too soon—the evening contents-bills began: "A NATIONAL GOVT.—Official." "NEW CABINET NAMES."—Late Night Final.

Ten Cabinet members had resigned. The second Labour Government had collapsed, largely through its own inability to grapple firmly with its domestic problems. MacDonald, with his fine, handsome head and his negative policies, remained, and so did Snowden, putting State before Party, to the fury of some former colleagues. Arthur Henderson, Lansbury, Bondfield & Co. were out. "The party system," said the *Sphere* that week, "has received a vital lesson and a healthy shake-out." An organized campaign against the "would-be dictators" of the Trades Union Council had begun.

There were two Chamberlains in the new Cabinet. Sir Austen was First Lord of the Admiralty; and "young Neville," aged sixty-three, the baby of the family, came in as Minister of Health. He had held the office twice before.

Holidays were over for that year. Parliament got down to business after a vote of confidence, and early in September "the most awful Budget speech in history" was made. It doesn't look so awful these days. But in the streets of the West End on the afternoon of that September 10th, you could feel England rock back on her heels with the blow.

Before the month was out the Gold Standard was suspended. Most people were rather hazy as to exactly what suspending the Gold Standard was, but it sounded terrible. The pound dropped to fifteen shillings. They could understand that better. A General Election was set for October. And everybody in England is only too familiar with the complete dislocation in business and private routine entailed in a General Election year.

It was a landslide for the Conservatives. In the revised Cabinet Neville Chamberlain became Chancellor, an office he had already held briefly in 1923. And as MacDonald's health visibly failed, Baldwin quietly took over the reins. Somewhat to everybody's surprise (even England's) things began to look up before very long.

When I got back to London in the summer of 1932, I found it a much more cheerful place than New York City. Looking through newspaper files, one wonders why. The Disarmament Conference at Geneva had "adjourned" to mask out-and-out failure. Britain's effort to set a good example to an obstreperous world had left her weaker than she had been in 1914. Reparations—that now forgotten word—could be written off. Hindenburg, Papen, Bruening, Schleicher, were all helpless against the rising Nazi tide. France whispered of a preventive war. The Balkans were all afraid of something, and Poland was afraid of Russia. But Britain was obstinately cheerful.

That year we had the Hunger Marchers.

They came down from the North on foot, under red banners. We heard about them for days before they arrived, and there were dire references to the 1830 riots. They were due on a Saturday. On Wednesday we had a fog blackout, known as a mushroom. An opaque pall hung over London, blocking out the daylight entirely but not invading the streets like a pea-souper. At noon all the lights in all the shops and streets were on and it looked like six p.m.—murky but no visible fog. It lasted all day, till normal darkness came. The effect was eery in the extreme, the next thing to a small earthquake I have ever experienced for a vague, pervading sense of queerness without real alarm.

Somehow the mushroom rather stole the Hunger Marchers' thunder. There was, after all, nothing cosmic about them.

On Saturday morning I was for some forgotten reason absent-minded. Something prevented me from reading the morning paper at breakfast. I was taking in the *Telegraph* and its headlines were all inside. I set off for my usual day in the British Museum Reading-Room with my bag of notebooks and the *Telegraph* still unopened under my arm. I was thinking about the book I was writing—it was still "The Tudor Wench," my third year of work on it—while the bus rolled along Bayswater Road into Oxford Street. Beyond Marble Arch I became conscious that it was a very slow trip, and reminded myself that it was Saturday—matinée day—shoppers. Then I opened the paper. Golly. Hunger Marchers. I began to watch out of the window.

I give you my word there was nothing. Nothing except a lot of extra traffic, which was avoiding Hyde Park Corner

at the other end of Park Lane, where the trouble—if there was any trouble—would be.

When I came out of the British Museum at lunch time the streets seemed a little emptier than usual, and there was a Special Constable in a peaked cap directing all-the-traffic-there-was at the top of Shaftesbury Avenue. He was the one unusual thing I saw that day, and he was there because all the regulars had been concentrated round Hyde Park Corner and Whitehall. He was a very handsome man.

It happened that a friend from the Museum was going back to the flat with me for tea, and she drove a small car. We proceeded without incident along Goodge, Wigmore, and Seymour Streets, parallel to Oxford Street a little to the north. A fine drizzle had begun to fall.

On Sunday, which was to be the day of the Big Doings, it rained; English rain, which is fine, steady, relentless, and cold. The morning papers all requested the population of London to remain at home, or at least to avoid the area around Trafalgar Square where the Doings were to take place, so as not to complicate matters for the police. I am not a reporter, I had no idea then that I would ever write a book like this one, I don't like standing about in the wet—so I made up a nice coal fire, spread out my note-books, drew up my typewriter, and went to work, leaving the police a free hand.

I was living that summer in a ground floor flat in Kensington Gardens Square, which is off Bayswater Road well west of Marble Arch. That is to say, I was living near a thoroughfare for demonstrations, parades, and such. Along about the time the Square grew dusky that Sunday afternoon—an early, rainy dusk, with lights from the houses op-

posite showing through the thinning leaves of the trees—an Englishman came to tea.

We were sitting in a room which had a big window looking on to the Square from behind the area railings, and the curtains were not drawn. There were hardly ever any passersby, the Square was very beautiful at twilight, and I loved to look at it. In London all during those years of what we called peace, thick velour drapes were pulled across the windows when the lights came on. Perhaps it was an old habit they grew into during the air-raids in the Great War. If there was a servant in the house, she would come charging in at dusk, snap on the lights and draw the curtains. It always had for me a faintly theatrical and 18th century effect: *Enter Maid with taper, lights lamp on table up right, and draws curtains at window centre rear.* Being a heretic Yankee, I had not drawn my curtains, and the big window was dark blue, with tree-shadows beyond, and shifting spangles of lamplight as other people's lights came on and went into eclipse.

Suddenly I heard a band, and I set down my cup, startled and a little thrilled.

"Listen!" I said. "A band!"

He looked at me uncomprehendingly.

"It must be the Hunger Marchers!" I cried, going to the window. "They must be coming this way!"

He did not move.

"That's the Salvation Army," he said.

It was.

I learned the next day what happened in Trafalgar Square.

Quite a lot of Hunger Marchers gathered there—in the rain. They stood about for a while, and some speeches were

made. It was pretty cold. Finally some of them thought it would be a good idea to go up the Mall to Buckingham Palace and tell the King about it. (George V, that was. Already he is two kings ago.) The mob in the Square surged westward. But the mounted police nipped round through the Admiralty Arch and closed the tall iron-work gates, cutting off the entrance to the Mall. With all due respect to Sir Aston Webb, who designed the thing, a good push would have done the business. But no. The Hunger Marchers looked at the closed gates and the mounted police—London police are unarmed in peace-time, remember—and thought better of it. They overturned a few taxi-cabs in the Square and nearby streets—a harmless sport which never damages the cabs to any extent—and more or less evaporated, back into Hyde Park where most of them were encamped. There were some more meetings, with speeches. And within a very few days practically all of them had gone home again, by train, third class, with their fares paid by the Government.

And that was Crisis Number Two.

I know, you read in the papers. English people came pelting home from Italy and Germany thinking the hour had struck in England and Revolution held sway. Their bewilderment was a funny thing to see, to us who had been there all along. "But the papers said—!" they kept repeating, stunned with relief. Even in America—"Where were you during the riots?" people would ask after I got home. And when I said "What riots?" they were annoyed with me and, I think, sometimes a little disappointed. Honest, a few taxi-cabs were tilted up on their sides, a few railings in Hyde Park were pulled up—and left there—a few arrests were made in all good humour—and then everybody went

home, third class, by rail, with their tickets bought by the Government. They had seen London, practically free, and had a large story to tell. The Distressed Areas, from which they came, were not, I'm afraid, much benefited at the time.

The *Sphere* boiled it down:

"Last week's rioting in Hyde Park would not have been considered worthy of two lines of print in the German newspapers, had it occurred in Cologne. But, occurring as it did in London, it was not only wildly exaggerated in the Continental press, but, because of its rarity over here, was an impressive item of domestic news in our morning papers."

So that was the Hunger Marchers. And that is what usually happens when the English, all of one blood, are stampeded by foreign agitators into some sort of mass demonstration. Pretty soon they feel sort of silly, and go home. Especially if it rains.

Well, it was all in the family, anyway. But next year it wasn't so funny when the annual Crisis came. Next year they began to be made in Germany.

Hitler got in as Chancellor in January, 1933—got in, it will be remembered, as the sole remaining hope of Germany against Communism, and as the implacable enemy of France. In April the persecution of the Jews began, and Goering became head of the Reich Air Ministry. Rearmament, military training, preparation for conquest, frightfulness, *revenge*, had begun. The Disarmament Conference, reassembled at Geneva in March, only wanted burying. The World Economic Conference at London was more or less decently interred in July after six futile weeks. Austria conferred dictatorship on its Chancellor, Dr. Dollfuss, and concluded

an alliance with Italy in an effort to stave off Hitler's known design to incorporate his native land in the German Reich. Russia, in a panic over the German threat to the Ukraine, dodged into six non-aggression pacts including Esthonia, Latvia, Poland and Rumania; applied for membership in the League; and looked to an alliance with France. France began to court Italy.

England, impressively, was able to announce a balanced budget under Neville Chamberlain's chancellorship.

It was the middle of October, 1933, when Hitler left the League, and the whole thing took me by surprise. I had got a little preoccupied with the stage production of "The Tudor Wench" which was going on at the Embassy Theatre in London. I hadn't been reading the newspapers for days, and the headlines about the Reichstag Trial and the dying Disarmament Conference which caught my eyes had got pushed to the back of my mind by more pressing details of the rehearsals, costume fittings, and fencing lessons, which lasted all day every day.

On the afternoon of October 14th, I came out of the Tube station at South Kensington, on my way to see a fencing rehearsal, and was confronted by the placards reading: "HITLER SURPRISE"; and: "HITLER LEAVES LEAGUE." It was a shock. The afternoon editions were just out, and the newsboys were thoroughly excited. One of the two Englishmen who were with me is the kind of man everybody talks to—it's a gift. He stopped to buy a paper, and the man in the red overall who sold it to him instantly became confidential. "You mark my words, sir, there'll be something going on!" he said. "You see that cab there—just moving off? Two men just got in it—and I 'eard one of 'em say 'Foreign Office, quick!' 'E did, so 'elp me! Somethin's up, I tell yer str'ight!"

It took quite a lot of sword-work, under the concentrated attention of a ruthless French fencing-master, to get our minds off it. But eventually, as the boys began to perspire and my spine began to tingle with the genuine risks which were required of them for the sake of realism, Hitler was forgotten—for a while.

Europe took it quietly. Cabinets met, and regretted that everything was so far gone in disarmament. But nobody did anything. Nobody was in a position to do anything.

That was Crisis Number Three.

1934 was worse. Much worse. It was a glorious hot summer, the finest weather I had ever seen in England. There was a drought, and the gardens at Hampton Court were parched beyond recognition. Even the cellar-damp of the Museum Reading-Room gave way to the heat outside, and it was possible to work there without wearing a coat. I was writing a book about Disraeli's youth.

At the very end of June the Blood Purge in Germany took place, and while any upheaval in Germany had become sinister, and it was a very ugly business in itself, it seemed after all a purely German matter; hundreds of "executions" because of an alleged plot for a "second revolution," and much suppressed scandal. We turned with relief to Wimbledon.

This was the first year that the air manoeuvres over London became really noticeable. For a week of hot nights one roused a dozen times between midnight and breakfast time to hear again the drone of planes overhead. It was an oppressive and unfamiliar sound in London. It told on everyone's nerves. There was trouble brewing in Austria, and one got to dread the morning papers.

On July 25th Dollfuss was rumoured dead. On the 26th

the whole sickening story broke, exactly twenty years after the zero hour of 1914. Everybody got a very sinking feeling.

They had tried to kill him during the previous autumn and missed his heart at close range. That made him dangerously popular all over the world, and drove an always uncombative Austria to some realization of her peril. The Nazis had then attempted a reign of terror in Austria, and Dollfuss had hit back stoutly, from the shelter of Mussolini's friendship, while his private army, the anti-Socialist Heimwehr, under Fey and Starhemberg, began to get out of hand. Italy too hated the Socialists. In February, 1934, "good little Dollfuss" had put down a Socialist "revolution" with four days of ruthless slaughter which included women and children. Thereby he destroyed his own best defence against Nazi domination, and thus he marked himself down for extermination by them. His murder was done in the baroque palace which had housed the dancing Congress of Vienna in 1815. It was staged in comic opera style, with the murderers disguised in familiar uniforms of trustworthy troops. He might have escaped, but for a locked door which delayed him.

We felt at the time that the massing of Italian troops on the border ready to come to the assistance of Austria had considerable effect in Germany. And Frau Dollfuss and her children found refuge with Mussolini. Schuschnigg, the unmagnetic, professorial man who was Dollfuss's chief aide, succeeded to the Austrian dictatorship. On the 27th the Austrian Minister in London stated that complete order had been restored in Austria, the frontiers were reopened, and the railways normal.

Before Europe could relax into another breathing spell, Hindenburg died, early in August. "HINDENBURG BE-

QUEATHS GERMANY TO HITLER" was one of the headlines. It was not reassuring.

Meanwhile I was having a little private crisis of my own. On the evening of August 12th I was rung up by a man on one of the London newspapers, who said that he had just had a conversation on the transatlantic telephone to Bermuda, where one William Beebe had just made a 2,500 foot descent in the bathysphere—and he had been commissioned to give me their love. We had a charming chat and that was that.

Several nights later in the very small hours my doorbell rang. I woke resentfully from a sound sleep, for I had been working very hard and rest was precious. Some absent-minded fool at the wrong door this time of night— A stab of apprehension brought me out of bed with a gasp.

"Who is it?" I called through the door.

"I've got a cable, m'm." (He said kyble.)

Somehow I got the door open and stuck out my hand round the edge and an envelope was put into it.

"Will you sign, please, m'm."

"Wait—" I said, fumbling at the sealed flap—must find a place to sit down. . . .

"Deep dives over. Stop. Three thousand twenty-eight feet today. New world. Giant fish. Love.

WILL"

I scrawled a rather shaky signature, handed back the slip, shut the door, and returned to bed, where I read the message again—well, what are you howling about, it's good news, isn't it?—but it was a hell of a fright—I was dead asleep—coming at this time of night, I could only think—

brace up, now, get hold of a book—read yourself to sleep again—*deep dives over*—nice of him to put that in—3,028 feet—more than half a mile straight down—I wonder how much cable there was left on the drum. . . . (Later I learned that there was so little left that half the length of the drum itself was laid bare, and the foolish frayed end of the cable stuck out.)

After an hour my bedside light was still burning and I was still reading myself to sleep. And now that insidious middle-of-the-night starvation began to creep between me and the page. Dressing-gown and slippers again—ice-box—a cup of hot Ovaltine and a slice of Hovis smeared with butter—back to bed—a very nasty fright. . . .

At dawn I was still reading, and my eyes had begun to hurt. At nine, when I was dozing, the char arrived relentlessly on time, and at five minutes past as per schedule she tapped on the bedroom door and entered with a large glass of hot water and lemon juice. Having been taught to behave in a civilized manner, she set it down on the bedside table and did *not* rip open the curtains and remark that it was a fine day. She went away and left me to come round, which I had to do for an early appointment in John Street. The play based on the still unfinished book about Disraeli was just going into production.

And that was the last bathysphere descent. It had better be.

But 1934 still had a few shots in its locker. 1934 was a long way from through.

Things brightened up a bit in September with the announcement of Prince George's engagement to pretty Princess Marina. Then we had another family row with the Mosley Fascists in Hyde Park. It was on a Sunday. "There

was a spate of oratory, but little of it was heard as Communist rivals tried to drown everything with a chorus of boos, shouting, and bugling. Eighteen arrests were made." The police spent all their time trying to protect the Fascists from the Communists and vice versa, while Mosley tried to make himself heard proclaiming that "once again the Blackshirts had done the impossible and held a mighty rally in the face of terror and corruption."

Amongst 6,000 police not one truncheon was drawn.

That blew over. The annual Nuremberg Congress blew over. Marina arrived in England by air, looking adorable. The Royal Family stood in pleased rows and were photographed. Wedding plans were being laid.

About six o'clock on October 9th I came out of a theatre manager's office in the Adelphi and walked up towards the Strand. With Derrick de Marney satisfactorily cast as the young Disraeli and most of the other parts filled, we had had a thwarted and discouraging day trying to find an actress to play Mrs. Wyndham Lewis—it was just before Sophie Stewart walked into our lives like an answer to prayer. Tired and cold, we decided we'd like a little drink at that place in Villiers Street. . . .

There were men selling papers in the Strand. "A KING ASSASSINATED."—*News*. "KING ALEXANDER SHOT."—*Standard*.

Ever since Sarajevo the word "assassination" has contained a peculiar terror. Ever since that utterly Graustarkian incident in the Zenda part of Europe, which might so easily have been just another plot for a George Barr McCutcheon thriller—one read them behind the geography at school and under the bedclothes by the light of an electric torch at

night—the Balkans had had for the rest of the world a morbid fascination.

In 1914 an Austrian archduke had gone to Sarajevo in Bosnia and died theatrically, with his wife beside him, from an assassin's bullets. A world war was the result of that; a war which altered or wiped out so many boundary lines in the geographies that conscientious little American schoolchildren took to picking the coverlet, and many highly coloured, faraway names disappeared from the maps altogether; words like Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, Dalmatia, Herzegovina (lovely, lovely Herzegovina!) and even Bosnia itself. Gone with the wind. Sarajevo was in Jugoslavia in 1934. And the King of Jugoslavia, who had once been the Crown Prince and Regent of Serbia, had just gone to Marseilles and died the same way the Austrian archduke had died, except that a French statesman was killed beside him. Assassination. It was near enough.

We needed that drink by the time we got it.

A few days afterward I saw, unwillingly, the uncensored film of the shooting at Marseilles. It was cut down later by the London authorities. Part of the film had been taken by a camera man who was killed beside his tripod by a stray bullet. Someone else got a camera right up against the glass of the open car immediately after it stopped. One saw the King's face, undistorted and austere, the eyes still open and apparently still focussed, the head resting against the back of the seat and someone's futile hand touching his hair and seeming to caress his forehead over the folded-back hood of the car. He died within twenty minutes. He has been described as "both implacable and bright-hearted"—a happy combination of words by Gunther. He belonged to that incredible, romantic, and irreplaceable pre-War world

of Courts and Kings and Archduchesses and Etiquette and Duty and a thing called International Law. He had been a page at the Czar's Court in Leningrad, even before it was Petrograd, and you found it on the map as St. Petersburg. Looking very much as he looked the day he died, he had commanded the Serbian army against Austria in 1914. He was a soldier and a king. His will provided explicitly that his son Peter, aged twelve, should finish his schooling in England, where he was at the time of his father's death. But when the will came into collision with the constitution of Jugoslavia, which says that the King must reside in his country, the constitution won, and the child was taken back to his cheerless destiny at Belgrade.

There is one thing more. Accustomed always to moving within the ranks of a strong bodyguard, Alexander must have known as soon as he set foot ashore at Marseilles that much was lacking in the arrangements for his protection. Yet out of some fantastic notion of courtesy to his hosts, or some courageous fatalism, he entered the open car and drove to his death. Poor old Barthou might have been saved if a surgeon had got at him in time. The film showed him crawling out of the car and into a taxi-cab. In the confusion, which was colossal, he was somehow allowed to be driven off alone to the hospital where he died.

The assassin of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife at Sarajevo was a starveling student fanatic from the backwoods of Dalmatia, to whom the bloodless annexation of Bosnia by Austria-Hungary in 1908 stood for the same sort of oppression as the German occupation of Austria in 1938. Although three older men were executed in October, 1914, for complicity in the plot, Princip, who fired the actual shots from the running-board of the Archduke's car, was

under the age for the death penalty. He was sentenced with fifteen fellow conspirators to prison. He died of tuberculosis and ill-treatment in the Fortress of Theresienstadt in April, 1918, without ever being able to take it in that he had started a World War. It is said that three of the other fifteen survived imprisonment and torture, and are still alive in Jugoslavia—regarding the Nazis today with an even greater aversion than they once had for the Hapsburgs. Vlada, the Bulgarian terrorist degenerate who shot Alexander, was struck down in the street at Marseilles by the sabres of the King's French escort. He was, apparently, only the tool of a powerful and well-hidden Croat conspiracy.

Once more, it didn't quite happen. And England was allowed to enjoy her Royal wedding in peace.

1935 began badly, with the return of the Saar to the Reich by plebiscite, and the reintroduction of conscription in Germany. There was feverish activity at Geneva over the Abyssinian question. Mr. Eden and his principles were well to the fore. The efforts of British statesmen to prevent Europe from splitting up again into just two camps, German and anti-German, as before the holocaust of 1914, resulted in the Anglo-German Naval Agreement—which upset France, whose pact with Russia was equally a sensitive point.

Mussolini, still somewhat put about by the murder of Dollfuss, had signed a pact with France guaranteeing Austria's independence. Hitler said: "Germany neither intends nor wishes to interfere in the internal affairs of Austria, to annex Austria, or to conclude an Anschluss." (Berlin, May 21st, 1935.) He also said: "Germany has concluded a non-aggression pact with Poland which is more than a valuable contribution to European peace, and she will adhere to it unconditionally. . . . We recognize the Polish State as the

home of a great patriotic nation, with the understanding and the cordial friendship of candid nationalists. . . ."

In the midst of all the conferences and continental tension, England was going ahead with her preparations for the Silver Jubilee of her beloved King George V. I arrived that summer after the actual Jubilee Day, but the King was still reviewing troops and making Royal drives and so on, and things were very gay and comfortable, and the weather turned superb. In August, however, we were reading things like this:

"As a purely precautionary measure in view of the Abyssinian mobilization, a number of Italian bombers attacked Adowa, inflicting inevitable casualties on civilians, while infantry and artillery crossed the River Mareb toward Adowa, which lies thirty miles from the Eritrean frontier. . . . Already we are back to the language of the World War. . . ."

The first real draught from the Continent blew into England then, through Abyssinia and the sanctions recriminations. There were enthralling BBC commentaries direct from Geneva. Suez Canal defences were looked to—the lifeline of the Empire.

In September Germany held army manoeuvres on a pre-war scale, and there was Nazi activity in Memel and Danzig, the latter very alarming to Poland. Hitler said: "Germany is the bulwark of the West against Bolshevism, and, in combating it, will meet terror with terror and violence with violence." (Berlin, November 29th, 1935.)

During the winter the old King died, and it seemed that a familiar, homely era had passed with him. One was not so sure of things. Of anything.

In March, 1936, German troops reoccupied the Rhineland in open defiance of an incredulous world, and once again there was mention in France of "preventive war." Hitler said: "After three years I believe that I can regard the struggle for German equality as concluded today. I believe, moreover, that thereby the first and foremost reason for our withdrawal from European collective collaboration has ceased to exist. We have no territorial demands to make in Europe." (Berlin, March 7th, 1936.)

In May the Emperor of Abyssinia fled from Addis Ababa and Italy had conquered Abyssinia in spite of the League of Nations and its futile sanctions. Very encouraging to Germany and Japan, who looked upon Italy with increased respect. But— "We do not want to divide the world into democracies and dictatorships," pleaded Mr. Eden at Leamington.

I found the English atmosphere of 1936 a little strange, beginning with the picture of a young and beardless man on the ship's cinema screen for God Save the King. I spent part of that summer living in the country in my own cottage (well, rented, but still exclusively my own while I lived in it) in Buckinghamshire. It was for me a new and enchanted life.

Days of shifting sun and cloud and shower in an English garden—an exasperated afternoon of trying to paint a lattice between gusts of fine warm rain—hot, sunny teas out of doors, when the thin shade from a lilac bush was blessed—cool, bright mornings, with the sound of a hay-machine coming through open casement windows—sudden, violent thunderstorms giving way to long, golden, sunlit, shining evenings—chilly, rainswept June nights with a coal fire and the radio tuned to Vienna (pre-Anschluss Vienna)—small

adventures with lost baby birds, half-grown hedge-hogs, and marauding cats—the thrill of digging the first potatoes and gathering the first raspberries from my own back garden—the morning round of the rosebushes with garden shears and a basket—the scent of roses always inside the house—the blue-clad butcher's daily call, and the increased importance of a telephone call from London or a letter from home. . . . That magic phrase, A Month in the Country.

There is really nothing so sad as an old happiness. Sorrow can ease with time, can be overlaid. But the memory of an old delight, a single sunny hour that will not come the same again, grows sharper with the passing of time. "How lovely that was!" can pinch the heart far worse than "What a dreadful time!" There was so little to worry about, that summer in Buckinghamshire, as I look back. Germany was intransigent as always; Italy was still defiant; Austria was not safe; there were mutterings in Spain. But we were not yet acutely conscious of Czechoslovakia. Danzig and Warsaw were still just cities among other cities on the map.

When I returned to Town there were already incredible, sibilant rumours about King Edward VIII.

During the summer civil war had flared up in Spain, and non-intervention began to take the place of sanctions talk. The conflict was soon seen to reduce itself to Fascist vs. Communist. Non-intervention by the other Powers, later considered by some a tactical blunder, was at the time supposed to confine the war to Spain and keep peace in Europe. Germany now discovered a close bond with Japan in their mutual hatred of Russia. Hitler said: "We see in Bolshevism a bestial, mad doctrine which is a threat to us. . . . I cannot make a pact with a régime whose first act is not the liberation of workmen but of the inmates of gaols. . . . We

cannot negotiate with Jewish Communist leaders. . . . These are two worlds. In Bolshevist Russia there is devastation, grim murder, and ruin. Here is laughter, happiness, and beauty." (Nuremberg, September 13th, 1936.) Out of mutual action in Spain against Communism, the Rome-Berlin Axis evolved.

1937 was still a little strange in England, with still a different boyish face on the God Save the King slide at the cinema. There had been an Abdication. Another Graustarkian word had been for a few weeks very alarming. People said what a good thing it was that Stanley Baldwin, a kind of embodiment of the John Bull ideal, was Premier at the time; he had taken over quietly from MacDonald soon after the Jubilee. In any case, England's shock-absorbers, the essential good temper and homogeny of her people, brought her through this supreme domestic crisis on an even keel—to the furious surprise of various people across various bodies of salt water.

The Spanish Civil War still dragged on, and the non-interventionists were under heavy fire in England, and Mr. Eden was very busy explaining things. But it was gay enough in spite of everything, that Coronation Summer, with no new international disasters to mar it seriously. The streets of London were full of grandstands and banners, and the hotels were full of money. The parks were full of canvas, as the thousands of troops taking part in the processions and ceremonies were encamped in the London area with such fashionable addresses as Kensington Gardens, Regent's Park, and Primrose Hill. 25,000 men were required just for lining the streets on the long route to and from the Abbey, and every unit in the British Commonwealth was represented in this vast composite army of the Empire.

The great day itself was cloudy, but during most of the summer true "King's weather" prevailed, as it had done during the Jubilee.

In the autumn the Berlin-Tokyo Anti-Comintern Front became a triangle which included Rome. In February, 1938, Mr. Eden resigned because he said he could not approve the Prime Minister's policy towards Italy. There was perhaps a tendency on Italy's part to overrate Mr. Eden as an adversary. Hence his absence from the Cabinet seemed to indicate to the Fascist powers that they could thereafter do exactly as they pleased without further opposition from England.

In May, 1936, Hitler had said: "The lie goes forth that Germany tomorrow or the day after will fall upon Austria or Czechoslovakia. I ask myself always: who can these elements be who will have no peace, who incite continually, who must so distrust, and want no understanding? Who are they? I know they are not the millions who, if these inciters had their way, would have to take up arms."

By the beginning of 1938, with Mussolini absorbed into the Hitler orbit, it was plain that the Austrian Chancellor Schuschnigg could no longer count on Italian support as Dollfuss had done. In February, 1938, Schuschnigg went to Berchtesgaden on a summons from Hitler and was browbeaten. In March German troops crossed the border and Austria ceased to exist as a nation independent of the Reich, and terror came to Vienna. In May, a year after Neville Chamberlain at sixty-nine had replaced the aging Baldwin (seventy-one) as Prime Minister, it had become plain that Czechoslovakia was next.

A great many of my days out of every summer since 1929 had been spent in the Reading-Room of the British Mu-

seum, and during that time I had written three books and three plays. Crises can come and go, the man in the red overall outside the gates in Great Russell Street can display what headlines he must—work goes on in the Reading-Room just the same. You climb the broad steps and pass between imposing columns and through the silent, heavy doors. Two more pairs of swing doors close behind you, and the magic insulation of confirmed scholarship relieves your beleaguered spirit of its burdens, international or domestic. A new perspective is yours. Its vanishing-point is just beyond a printed page. You are at peace.

The Little-did-I-think narrative method is now considered bad form. But I must do it just this once. Little-did-I-think, all those years, that I would ever see the day when the Museum-magic would fail me—any more than I ever expected to see the Museum itself banked with sand-bags against a possible aerial bombardment of London. That day came in September, 1938.

3. *Waiting*

THE London papers of Sunday, September 11th, 1938, had on the whole a desperate sort of calm, a last-minute sanity, which somehow failed to reassure. One of them went so far as to say that it was the "most dangerous week-end since 1914," which was typical of the general understatement. I thought I was being clever not to rely on one paper alone. This was no time, I told myself, to let it go at the *Times*. I had them all. There are seven, on Sundays. And there was very little to choose between them. Not even the most sensational showed any sign of panic.

It was on this Sunday that the always dignified *Observer* carried as its main headline: "THE CRISIS"—thus establishing a precedent and endowing the word with a new significance which it will perhaps never lose for anyone of this generation. I have those London papers before me as I write. And though I had at the time no inkling that I would ever try to set down, except in letters, any record of those September days, I marked a passage by "Scrutator" of the *Sunday Times* which still seems worth quoting:

"The constitutional problem in Czechoslovakia has sensibly eased of late. The Sudeten Germans have so far asked only for Home Rule, never for separation, still less for union with Germany. That they had just grievances is ad-

mitted even by the Czechs, and the Prague Government, if it had been wiser, would have hastened to remove them while Germany was still weak, and have found better guarantees of safety in contentment at home than in foreign alliances. Had its present offer been made even at the beginning of March, before the German troops entered Austria, it would have forestalled the present troubles. But, as with us in Ireland, delays have increased the price of settlement."

The weather was cool and cloudy with a leaden quality in the air which lay heavy on one's consciousness the whole time. Breakfast was pretty well buried under the Press, and I sat awhile beside a last cup of tea staring at the printed columns, unable to focus on my own work. An incurably orderly mind, disciplined by years of historical research and note-books filled with the chronological detail of past centuries, insisted on casting up accounts for the week, though somehow I had not as yet formed the conscious thought that I myself was living history, hour by hour. With the newspapers here on my desk, it is possible to reconstruct that depressing Sunday breakfast-table reverie.

The Nuremberg Congress had been on for six days and Hitler was apparently saving Czechoslovakia for the last night, like a little boy with the biggest fire-cracker. Consummate stage-manager that he is, he had chosen to ignore the whole issue and harp on Germany's might and integrity of purpose until even Nuremberg nerves were at breaking-point with suspense. Henlein was supposed to be suffering from a cold, and was practically invisible, though one correspondent described him as looking "reflective and careworn."

This man with the broad, plain German countenance had

founded the Sudeten German Party on October 1st, 1933. In 1935 he was in London round Christmas time, and he said then in an interview (a) "Pan-Germanism is a European policy at least as dangerous as Pan-Slavism and will lead to catastrophe," and (b) "It is impossible to detach the German-speaking parts of Czechoslovakia from the Republic." At that time he also made a great point of the fact that he had never seen Hitler, and had forbidden his party to communicate with Nazi officials. I found myself wondering at just what point Herr Henlein's engine had got away from him on the down-hill grade. And he, with his diplomatic cold—was he wondering too?

It would be even more frightening if you could remember how it felt in 1914, I thought. What an awful here-we-go-again sensation *that* must be! And I went for a walk in the Park, where the dahlias in the sunken garden were beginning to show what they could do.

Monday was sunny and warm and normal. But it was impossible to pretend to do anything but wait for the Speech which was to come that evening. I think there was a general disinclination to sit about alone. In the middle of the afternoon an Englishman came for me in his car and we drove into Hyde Park, got out, and had tea under a big umbrella at a table on the lawn. A lot of other people had had the same idea; well-dressed, smiling, chatting people, drinking tea—and waiting. There weren't many newspapers among them. Newspapers weren't much good to us till tomorrow morning.

After tea we went and sat in a couple of canvas chairs down by the Serpentine in the dappled shade of a big tree. I wanted to be in the shade and he wanted to be in the sun, and as the sun moved we hitched our chairs along with it,

absurdly. People were rowing about in boats, the men with their coats off. Dogs chased their balls. Not far away a dignified middle-aged pair unpacked a tea-basket with thermos and sandwiches and made a picnic, as it is quite a usual thing to do in the Park. The green lawns and trees kept traffic and city noises at a distance, so that one heard, long before he came in sight, the tinkle of the bell on the chair-man's tuppenny ticket-puncher, and the gay voices of children who laughed a long way off.

Down by the water a group of earnest men in overalls and neck-cloths were gravelling a tarred walk out of a two-wheeled horse-drawn cart. It was all that seemed to matter to them—the tidy finish to the surface of the path. The little horse stood on three legs, drowsing in the sun—a cushy job for him. Beyond the road-menders was the boat-house, with its flag at half-mast for the death of Prince Arthur of Connaught, who had slipped quietly out of life in his sleep during the night, aged only fifty-five. Like Kipling, dying in the immediate shadow of the old King's death, Prince Arthur, cousin to the King and son of Victoria's son, had become inconspicuous under the headlines of Nuremberg.

We said very little. The English rarely think aloud, however well you know them, and the man beside me was thinking. He was young, with heavy responsibilities. A gap in his earnings, even if military service proved to mean no more than that, would present a very serious problem. With our eyes on the painstaking business of levelling off with gravel a tarred walk by the Serpentine, I perceived that our thoughts had followed the same byway, for presently he remarked that if he woke up tomorrow to find that they were dropping bombs on London it would doubtless come as less of a shock to him than to me, because his childhood in

Brighton during the war had more or less broken him in to it, and anyway he had been living on top of the possibility for as long as he could remember. . . .

I found I could think of nothing to say to that.

Sitting there beside the Serpentine in the September sunshine, I first faced the actual, concrete, cold-blooded idea of War—now, tomorrow, next week—War over London.

It came with a sort of cosmic shock too big to have a personal application. We two in our canvas chairs didn't come into it. Anyway, we didn't have to go on sitting there in the open to be bombed. But London itself—not just the familiar Whitehall skyline, not the bricks and mortar of the Palaces—but London in essence, as a place where you could have tea out of doors, where you could row a silly boat on an artificial lake, where you got a pink chair-ticket for tuppence—a place where, as in no other capital in the world you could do as you pleased, and welcome—that London was threatened. More than the people who might be killed, a State of Mind might die.

I leaned back and shut my eyes. Don't say any of this. It's bad enough already. Sit still. Let him alone. This is childish. England doesn't go off half-cocked. We'll pull through, somehow. Maybe after tonight. . . .

"I was thinking," said the quiet voice beside me, "if you want to get down into the West Country, you ought to go now, by train."

"I suppose I ought," I said, with my eyes shut. "We'll see how it looks—tomorrow."

It was ridiculous and laughable, to attempt to resent the fact that on top of everything else my own personal plans had been upset by this nasty business about Czechoslovakia. War hung over the whole world—and I went on trying to

write a footling book with its scene laid in the Mendip Hills. It made for an inferiority complex.

Originally there were to have been four of us in two cars, for a week's amble through the West Country, with Bath or Wells as headquarters. I had been looking forward to it rather a lot, not just for the sake of the book. But the other two, with children in their teens home from school, didn't feel like a jaunt as things were, and I couldn't set off for several days motoring with an unattached young man, who had a few other things on his mind. If it didn't clear up soon I would just have to go by myself before I sailed. If it didn't clear up soon, would the book matter anyway, and furthermore, would I be sailing?

It used not to be this way in England, I thought drearily, as I sat there beside the Serpentine. Ten years ago we had almost forgotten Germany, and the word Nazi was not yet in our vocabulary. There hadn't even been a Depression. Where were you, said the prosecutor suddenly, pointing, in 1928?

Well, let's see, where were we? Hats came down to the eyebrows, skirts were up to the knees, belts were round the hips. Spain was a popular travel resort; a sunny, smiling, peaceful land ruled by Alphonso XIII, Queen Ena, and the portly Primo de Rivera who was wont to admit cheerfully that he was not a Mussolini. The Kellogg Pact was signed in August, outlawing war; Baldwin signed for England, Briand for France, Stresemann for Germany; there were fifteen original signatories, and it was hoped that eventually sixty-two nations would sign. Pilsudski had refused the dictatorship of Poland, naming himself Marshal instead. The first Zeppelin was ready to cross the Atlantic. Berlin was gay, and its women were slimming.

"The German people, formerly a rigid mass compelled to keep mum or when it spoke to expose itself to censorship, is today empowered to take the most decisive initiative. Meetings which formerly were held under the eyes of a stupid policeman who could stop them whenever he saw fit by simply putting on his spiked helmet, may be held today in complete freedom, and at such meetings the government may be openly criticized. Most important of all, the fateful question 'War or Peace?' which in former times was answered by the monarch alone, without consultation with his ministers and much less with the Reichstag, is now a matter for the Reichstag alone to decide, and its decision must be in strict accordance with the law. . . . There is no longer anything chic about a uniform in Germany. . . . Germany's neighbours, exposed formerly to constant worry by the capricious neurasthenic actions of the last German ruler, are now confronted with a calm Germany, ruled by a national will expressed by men from many political parties. . . ."

That was an article by Emil Ludwig in 1928.

Trotsky was in exile, Stalin in the ascendant. Mussolini had been nine years in power and held seven of the thirteen folios in the Cabinet. Poincairé, cold, hard, un-French, ruled France. King George V caught a feverish cold at the Cenotaph on Armistice Day. Queen Mary sent Noni the clown a carnation from her bouquet at the Command Performance, because he said nobody ever sent a clown flowers. Princess Elizabeth was a dignified baby of two. Shirley Temple had not been born. Chicago was known as the Paradise of the Gangster, and the home of Big Bill Thompson. Tilden lost to Cochet at Wimbledon. Amelia Earhart flew the Atlan-

tic. Croydon was just finished as an airport. Byrd was going to fly the South Pole. Roy Chapman Andrews emerged from the Gobi Desert with dinosaur eggs. Ronald Colman was mobbed at Waterloo Station. We were reading "Trader Horn" and "San Luis Rey" and Michael Arlen. A remote and halcyon time.

It used to be—how long ago—even last year—that you got into a friend's car with a couple of extra pounds in your pocket to pay your share, and a map, and the whole day before you, and that's all there was about it. You just went. London would still be there when you got back, tired and cold and hungry, a little before midnight. And you stopped at the Marble Arch Corner House and had scrambled eggs, before being dropped at your own door, and you went to bed and slept like a baby after all that fresh English air.

How lovely that was.

Take, for instance, the year I wanted to see High Wycombe, where at the Red Lion Hotel Disraeli had made his first electioneering speech at the age of twenty-eight. The National Party which Disraeli demanded in 1832 was formed ninety-nine years later, and did quite a lot towards saving the country in 1931.

I am not much given to pilgrimages per se, and the High Wycombe expedition was on a sound research and note-book footing from my desire to know first hand what was left of the delicious part of the world Disraeli loved best. The driver of the car that day was Derrick de Marney, who had played Disraeli at the Kingsway and the Piccadilly Theatres the year before, and who like myself will always cherish a cheerful conviction that Dizzy was a pal. Whatever Dizzy did, to the end of his days, was to Dizzy adventure. Adventures, he used to say, were to the adventurous. He has not been

dead very long, as time goes. I have talked to a man who can remember standing in Parliament Square as a boy and watching a tall figure with stooping shoulders make its way towards Westminster Hall—Dizzy was Prime Minister then.

Nothing connected with that kaleidoscopic character could ever be quite devoid of colour. And so we knew before ever we passed Whiteley's on the way out of Town that it was not going to be a dull trip. Not with Dizzy aboard. Something would happen. He would see to that.

It was a grey, cool day with a threat of drizzle when we set out into "leafy Bucks"—his favourite county. More than once I have noticed how sharply drawn in actual geography are the county lines of England. I am convinced that I know the exact spot where Buckinghamshire becomes Hertfordshire (barer, plainer, with more pasture land) or Oxfordshire (flatter, more cultivated, with lines of tall elms against the sky) or Bedfordshire (bare brown rounded hills against a smooth horizon) on half a dozen roads. The secondary roads in Bucks as you reach the Chilterns are steep and narrow and surprising, with high bordering hedges and patches of superb woodland—a cosy, green, and sheltering countryside, with delectable villages in its pockets.

The town of High Wycombe manufactures Windsor chairs, and is not lovely in itself except briefly where a wide, brown stream runs beside the road. The life-size red plaster lion is still there on the portico of the Hotel, near the market place. Below him, round the edge of the portico, which is supported by stout Georgian columns painted bright green, runs a red neon sign advertising dancing and dining. Here in the heart of the Disraeli country, renovation and progress have occurred, and the lion's expression is supercilious.

We drove into the courtyard of the Hotel—remnants of

the old stables are still visible—and went into the dining-room for tea. It was still not quite raining, but the air was damp and grey. The entrance hall and lounge had been done over very recently and were damp and green. The vast dining-room was new, with an aggressive carpet and a big cabinet radio. The waiter didn't seem to like us. One wondered who made merry there, and when.

On the way out, after a worse than commonplace tea, we opened a door on the left which revealed the old smoking-room and billiard-room. The dark woodwork and worn leather furniture were right. The window looked on the quiet street, and the walls must have heard young Dizzy's voice. A new mechanical gambling game was backed up against the empty fireplace.

The Red Lion Hotel has no postcard of itself for sale. We crossed the road to a bookseller's shop and tried to buy postcards there. There weren't any which showed the Red Lion. Nobody seemed to care that Disraeli was ever there—or to know who Disraeli was. Thoroughly downed, we returned to the street where the car waited, and bought a large glass jar of pickled onions from a woman with a barrow, their small smooth sides showing pearly through the rich brown liquid in which they swam: a local delicacy I had to be persuaded to try, and my conversion was swift and complete.

We then crawled back into the car, still feeling damped, and started in search of the village of Bradenham where we hoped to catch at least a glimpse through its gates of the manor house where Dizzy had lived as a young man before his marriage, and where old Isaac died peacefully a short time after his favourite son reached the Front Bench.

As we turned into the Princes Risborough road it began really to rain, and we nearly missed a very small signboard

which said *Bradenham* in very small letters, indicating a lane leading right. I had seen pictures of the house itself, and had read a good deal about it. It is lovingly described in "Endymion," which Dizzy wrote many years after his father's death, when he and his Mary Anne were living at Hughenden near by. But still I was not prepared.

Bradenham pub on our left at the bottom of the lane was without signs of life. There was a row of little cottages with flower-starred gardens on one side, and on the other an open field which was the village green, overgrown and empty. At the top of the green, on what Disraeli termed "a gentle elevation," its exquisite iron gates standing open, was Bradenham Manor, banked with old trees, and beside it a tiny grey stone church. Not such a consummate setting as Compton Wynyates, no. By no means a spectacular estate like Hatfield. But it seemed a living, breathing creature as it sat there that day in the rain, so accessible, so welcoming, in such simple perfection. The short approach along the lane to the sharp turn left at the church was one of the most satisfying things that has ever happened to me.

We stopped the car at the edge of the green below the church and just sat there, looking, while the rain streamed down. No one was in sight, but the house was alive and lived in, behind its tidy rows of sash windows and its rosy brick façade. It was impossible to believe that if we drove into the gravelled carriage-sweep and rang the bell we should be anything but warmly received. "We will write and ask to come inside," we decided, and drove on reluctantly up the lane which runs along the edge of the beech woods where Disraeli used to walk with Mary Anne on her visits to Bradenham during her widow's year before he married her.

We did write, and we were indeed warmly received by

the lady who lives there now. She leases it each summer from the same family who let it to Isaac. She says they have other houses they prefer to live in. She showed us everything, from the top storey rooms under great old beams with a lovely view of the Chilterns out little windows under the eaves, to the kitchen passage which still reveals bits of the old Tudor walls. What was the gun-room in Disraeli's time is now the dining-room, because the room the Disraelis used for a dining-room is so far from the kitchen it is difficult to keep things hot till they get to the table. She gave us tea in the great hall which has two fireplaces. She took us all over the grounds, up into the yew walk where Meredith must have strolled with Sarah, down into the rose garden which looks out westward towards the sunset.

She deserves to live at Bradenham. I can pay her no higher compliment.

✦

(In case anyone is wondering why I do not get on with the Crisis hereabouts, I can only answer Presently. I can only remind you that this is a record of England in her halcyon times as well as in her travail. For those sunny days, some of which I shared with her, are the real England, and will live forever.

(I know that I digress long and often. From the beginning, this was intended as a book of digression. And yet you do perceive it has a pattern. Its hub is the year which led to war. Its outward reach, however deep into the past, is tethered firmly to that year at the centre. If the war had not come, imperilling so much that has been so safe for so long, no such book would have been attempted.

(And furthermore, I can only try to explain that those last three dreadful weeks in September, 1938, were for me in

some ways like a drowning man's last three minutes. The past decade of full summer days and their far-flung associations kept flashing through my memory in a poignant panorama of peace and leisure and legend. I was in a sort of fourth dimensional state of mind where a half-forgotten afternoon or a faded impression of a town I had not visited for years turned fresh and vivid and lay between me and the twilit London actually under my eyes. It was a rather frightening mental phenomenon, heightening instead of alleviating my sense of walking through a doomed world, where soon the only things one could bear to think about would be the things one had done long ago. . . .

(Over and over again, waiting at the chemist's counter, or sitting in a bus, or walking along the street—brushing my teeth, dropping off to sleep—anywhere, any time, a lightning flare of memory might light up an episode long buried in my subconscious store of pleasant days gone by. And of the two dates thus superimposed, it was always 1938 that seemed the phantom. This was nightmare, now. Soon I would wake up and find it so. The other time, the happy time, was real.

(The hypersensitive sounding-board of memory even supplied some old Tennysonian lines in a poem beloved of my childhood, which I have since traced down—

> "On a sudden in the midst of men and day,
> And while I walk'd and talk'd as heretofore,
> I seem'd to move among a world of ghosts,
> And feel myself the shadow of a dream. . . .")

✦

There were great bowls of blue hydrangeas on the altar in Exeter Cathedral, the day I was there in 1929. A bar of sun-

light slanting through a high window turned them pure cerulean. A group of sunburnt country boys in thick boots—it must have been market day—clumped about awkwardly over the stone floor, silent and awed and beauty-struck, absorbing impressions for which they would never have words, but deeply appreciative, down to the bottom of their inarticulate souls. There are more important things at Exeter. It has a minstrels' gallery in the triforium; the most perfect one in England. Its astronomical clock is seven hundred years old and was made by a man who believed that the earth and not the sun was the centre of the solar system. The East Window above the altar was inserted in 1390, and the glass is very old and lovely. The bell is called "Great Peter," and it came from Llandaff in Wales in 1480; and on the 5th of November, 1611, it cracked from "a too violent ringing in commemoration of the Gunpowder Plot." It weighs between 12,000 and 14,000 pounds, but they rang it till it *cracked*. I would like to have heard. Exeter is a proud city, and rightly so. Its motto, *Semper Fidelis*, was bestowed by Queen Elizabeth. It is a long time since I was there. But if you say "Exeter!" to me suddenly, I will always think first of blue hydrangeas in a cathedral sunbeam, and the faces of Devonshire farm lads gazing in simple reverence—and that is good enough even for Exeter.

There were millions of snails on the ivy-grown walls at the top of Lewes Castle, after a misting rain. We had to brush them off before we could perch on the crumbling masonry and look out across Sussex. The *View* is starred in the guide-books, adm. 6d., and worth every farthing of it. Lewes is a Norman Castle, built on the edge of the South Downs, and it rises to a really dizzy height. The district used to be famous for its bad roads, of which Defoe tells a story:

"Here I had a sight, which indeed I never saw in any other part of England: Namely, that going to church at a country village, not far from Lewis [sic], I saw an ancient lady, and a lady of very good quality, I assure you, drawn to church in her coach with six oxen; nor was it done in frolic or humour, but meer necessity, the way being so stiff and deep, that no horses could go in it."

And once I came into Cambridge in a motor car after dark, across the fen country from the East. I had never been there before. It was during the Long Vacation, and the University Arms was closed—and has the reputation of being very expensive. We were hungry and wanted a good dinner, and we were late for a hot meal. The Bull looked rather too grand for a couple of vagabonds in suède jackets, and we passed it by. At the Blue Boar they cooked us steaks the like of which one seldom finds anywhere, and it was after hours too, and they gave us all the right things to go with them, for 4/6 each. And it was at Cambridge that I first discovered a taste—long and deep and lasting—for mild-and-bitter. The town looked large and mysterious as we left it, with the unlighted, looming shapes of the University buildings. It was hard to imagine its colour and movement in term time. (Of all the legends concerning the long rivalry between Oxford and Cambridge I like best the brief statement to the effect that: An Oxford man walks as though he owned the earth; and a Cambridge man walks as though he didn't care who owned it.) Arriving in a town after dark is excellent fun, but one should have planned to sleep there and find it still all about one in the morning light. To leave it again, blind and groping and unsatisfied, is quite maddening. The man in the Blue Boar's garage took an anxious interest in our

welfare when he found we were driving to London that night, and was much concerned about the best place for us to get a small warmer-upper on the way in. He assured us we could not get past Royston before closing time, and recommended the Bull, sharp left and up a hill as you enter the town. It proved to be sound advice.

At Guildford once I met a truly noble cheese. It was a Stilton, and it lived at the Angel in a round crock with a snowy napkin folded round the edge. The Angel is in the steep High Street, an unpretentious white-painted inn on the right as you go down the hill under the famous overhanging clock. You drive into a courtyard, and are met by a friendly person in a green baize apron, who looks on paternally while you park the car in a sort of shed. You go in the courtyard door—I find I cannot tell you what the street entrance to the Angel is like—and the dining-room is upstairs, with sunlight streaming into it across the clean white napery and polished silver. The idea is to lunch there, in the sunlit room, on simple fare, with a silver tankard sweating gently beside your plate—and then you say, "How's the Stilton?" And if it is May or June, and if your luck is in, you may encounter a direct descendant of the one I found there in, I think, 1937. You will remember it often again, over a lump of hard Camembert in a gilded London hotel. At Guildford too is one of those little churches whose chancel is not quite in line with its nave—that significant bend which is said to represent the inclination of Christ's head on the Cross. (You can find it again at Stratford.) Lewis Carroll lies in one of Guildford's two cemeteries, forgotten. The name on the tombstone is, of course, Dodgson.

At Salisbury I stood with my elbows on a low stone wall and watched a pink sunset fade from the windows of the

great West Front. And then, by a happy accident, I left the precincts through Harnham Gate and came to an unforgettable lane whose high brick walls were overhung by heavy, mingling sprays of jasmine and pink roses, pale in the slow twilight, their two scents blended each into the other.

It was my lot first to behold Stonehenge in a pouring rain. We say, as casually as possible and hoping that we are somewhere near right, that it was a temple of the sun, which dates it 1700 years before Christ; or that the stones may have been brought on rollers from Brittany before there was an English Channel; or that it was a center of Druid rites of which Rome was forever unaware; or that Merlin brought the stones from Ireland and raised them by incantation; or—but nobody really *knows*. Except one thing: the stones are *hewn*. And when it rains they cast no shadows, and there are few other visitors, and you prowl about under an umbrella—and you notice suddenly that nobody is speaking above a whisper.

There are dozens of genteel and depressing hotels in Tunbridge Wells. But at the Castle our sherry was brought to us in a chintz alcove off the dining-room where a coal fire burned; and the dinner which followed was cooked to order and served with grace and charm by an elderly waiter who knew how to present a meal. Afterwards we walked out into a bit of vacant field to see one of the last of the little local fairs, with a calliope and penny gambling games. It was sparsely attended, run down, with the gilt off, and somehow thoroughly heartbreaking. The cinema has much to answer for.

Once we went to Portsmouth to see Nelson's ship, the *Victory*, then on display beside the old quay. We lunched at Nelson's inn, the George, where they show the room in which he spent the night before embarking on his last voy-

age. It is still in use. And just across the passage from it is the one alleged to have been occupied by Lady Hamilton. It contains a fine, white-clad four-poster bed, and the day I was allowed to look in, a commercial traveller's bags were in possession and his shabby mackintosh hung on the peg on the inside of the door.

Once, it is difficult to remember how, I found myself in a Cook's Tour bus going to Windsor in the company of a sea-captain. There were stops at Stoke Poges, Eton, and Virginia Water. The last looks quite as lovely as it sounds, but its associations are a little incongruous. It was concocted, with pretty grounds and an artificial cascade, for that Duke of Cumberland who was affectionately known as "Billy the Butcher" after the battle of Culloden. And its synthetic scenery was further enhanced by George IV when he retired to the Royal Lodge there to live in somewhat elderly sin with Lady Conyngham. Cumberland had erected a Chinese Temple on the island, and George IV added a picturesque ruined temple, where he could sit among classical columns and fish. He used to give picnics in tents along the water's edge, while a band in a boat on the water played "God Save the King," and it was all very rustic and expensive. Victoria was taken there to visit him when she was a child, though she saw little of him as a rule because he hated the sight of her mother. . . .

These were the ghostly footsteps that pattered through my memory while we waited, in 1938. And if one must be haunted, one can at least be grateful for such pleasant shades.

4. *The Next Move*

THE normal BBC news broadcasts came at 6, 7:30, and 9:40 P.M., and no change was made in the schedule on that momentous September 12th. A little before 6 we left our chairs by the Serpentine, bought a cold chicken and some beer, and drove back to my flat to eat a scratch dinner there in order to get the news as it came in.

The six o'clock broadcast had nothing new, and the dry, careful voice of the announcer—as unrevealing as a poker face—was strangely comforting. At 7:30 a brief résumé of the opening parts of the speech at Nuremberg was given, with the slightly cynical comment (though in a voice always devoid of expression): "Herr Hitler is still speaking." Some home news followed, and then the announcement that at 9:30 there would be a full report on the speech before the news.

I think it was this evening that we first heard a disturbing addition to the regular news broadcast, which at first puzzled us and then became dazzlingly clear in a burst of realization: an unintelligible mass of figures and nautical terms read out at dictation speed—which means long pauses—had to do with the laying of mines in the North Sea, and was being given in code.

At 9:30 the speech for which the whole world had been waiting was revealed to have contained "nothing particularly new or sensational." There was a brief recording of the high,

ranting voice and the organized cheering. And we were left looking at each other over a fresh bottle of beer, and feeling rather flat. "Well," one of us said slowly, "I suppose it might have been worse."

The morning papers took more or less the same view. "THE SPECTRE STILL WAITS"—"THE SHADOW NOT LIFTED" —were typical headlines. Paris observed that the speech had been "violent but vague"; there was no optimism there. As usual under any outside threat to La Patrie, France had completely forgotten all its domestic vendettas and faced the enemy as one man—one Frenchman. That this has always happened is a thing which France's enemies can never seem to learn. Whitehall said that Germany "had not closed the door to further negotiation," and apparently regarded the situation as no better and no worse. The New York *Times* spoke feelingly of "a fear-haunted twilight zone between war and peace." But rioting broke out in Czechoslovakia, and martial law was proclaimed.

The next day, Wednesday, I made a routine trip to my bank and to the steamship office to verify an October sailing date. There was no excitement in the streets of London; only a sort of grim calm. The morning papers had reported that all westward sailings on neutral shipping lines were packed out for weeks to come, and that there was a rush to book space on an American cruiser lying at Gravesend. Somehow the idea of living on a battleship in a harbour with a war on didn't at all appeal to me, even if she flew the stars and stripes. I felt that anywhere in the middle of England would be quieter. And speaking of middles, there had begun to be a queer sort of knotty feeling where my stomach ought to be. Other people said they had it too.

Mine is—to me—a very funny bank, in swankest May-

fair, where by an accident of acquaintanceship I have a checking account on a small residential sum. It is so exclusive that when I go there to draw out some money I am usually the only client in sight and the manager rallies round for a chat. He is an enormous cheery man, all golf and Savile Row, and he feels responsible for me when I am in England without my husband there to protect me. Once when I had long overstayed my original plans in order to see a play into production he presented me most gallantly with an elastic overdraft to carry me till the box-office got on the job. He said as he did so that there was no sense in my ever cabling home for money, what was the bank for, anyway?

He was entirely cheerful on the 14th, declaring that while nobody's guess was much good, his was that we weren't "in for it this trip." We discussed the prevalent rumour that in the event of war being declared conscription would come in at once, and he remarked that as for him, he was a Special Constable with Piccadilly Circus as his beat! We agreed that if anything dropped it could hardly miss him, and he rocked with laughter at the prospect. This is the kind of man who won the last war, I thought, and my own laughter stopped with a wrench. He oughtn't to have to do it again. Twice in a lifetime was twice too much. Meanwhile he was complaining that nobody would invest in anything these days, that the banks were, if he might put it that way, lousy with money just lying there idle, and believe it or not, the banks didn't like it. I said I'd like to help him out, and would take ten pounds, please.

My pal at the steamship office in Cockspur Street said he didn't think there was "anything in it this time" and added at once that of course that was just his own opinion; con-

firmed my booking for October, and admitted that business was brisk just now.

Things got no brighter during the day. Parliament was to be recalled on the 27th of September instead of November 1st, for a full-dress debate on Foreign Affairs. Paris was distributing ARP (Air Raid Precautions) emergency instructions, and sand buckets. Berlin was reported to be very gloomy. Wall Street showed symptoms of panic. Henlein was expected to demand a plebiscite. Goering was now the one who was mysteriously ill. It was rumored that he did not approve of something or other, and had gone into eclipse. No one was sure what it was that he did not approve of. Russia was believed to be arranging to march through Rumanian and Polish territory to Czechoslovakia's assistance if war began—and if Russia could be counted on to march at all.

I dined that evening with a different Englishman, an older man who had been in what could at that time still by the grace of God be referred to merely as the War. We had a good dinner and a good wine, and we did not dwell on the question which was waiting at the back of everyone's consciousness: Who would make the next move? At the end of a surprisingly cheerful evening in the circumstances, he drove me back to the flat and came in for a pipe. I had decided to take the train to Wells the next morning and look round down there a bit, just in case. . . .

We sat discussing what I should see again, for we both knew and loved the dreamy town and its cathedral and its Swan Inn. We had managed to get ourselves into a state of mind where the fact that we were missing the late news broadcast no longer mattered; barricading ourselves from

the arduous present with memories of peace and stillness in Somerset which had become very precious.

Once during our leisurely conversation we seemed to hear the voice of a newsboy in Bayswater Road, and after we had listened a moment unwillingly, he said, "I wouldn't read another Special Edition if they gave it me." The human nervous system occasionally rebels, one way or another. Ours had rebelled into inertia. Tomorrow we would read the papers again. Tonight we had got past it.—I assure you there had only been one small carafe of *vin rosée* at dinner.

A little before midnight he knocked out his pipe and went home. About fifteen minutes later my telephone rang and his voice came down the wire, not quite as casual as it had been all evening. "They've been listening to the late news bulletin here at home," he said. "I thought you'd want to know at once—Chamberlain is flying to Germany tomorrow."

So now we knew who was making the next move.

There are always professional objectors who can be relied on to go on objecting. But to everyone I happened to come in contact with in England that September—from taxi-drivers to people I had known for fifteen years—Neville Chamberlain's first flight to Germany seemed a gallant gamble, a great adventure, or a jolly good try.

Perhaps because he was for so long only the youngest of three Chamberlains, while the monocled Sir Austen carried on in the limelight above him, the Prime Minister was informally known to all classes by his own first name, without any abbreviation or nickname. Good old Neville, they shouted to him that morning as he left Downing Street for Heston Airport. Neville had a nerve, at his age, they said. Neville had taken his foot in his hand. His lean, narrow figure, his

soon-to-be-famous umbrella, his dour Birmingham background, his vitality and enterprise—all endeared him and made him comprehensible to the anxious Briton in the street. "I'm peaceful enough, God knows," said one of my tradesmen with a grim smile, "but if he doesn't come back safe I'll go over there myself—!" That man was not the only one who felt rather as though St. George was setting out again, alone, to encounter the dragon. "Why doesn't he take a regiment with him?" I heard more than once, and only half in jest.

Some time later—in fact, after I had got back to America—I learned that there were people who had felt themselves humiliated because the Prime Minister of Great Britain, aged sixty-nine, should make a trip by air (his first) to consult the supreme ruler of a foreign power in an eleventh-hour effort to save the peace of the world. A diligent combing-out of the British Press revealed that there were people in England who felt the same way. I didn't happen to come across any of them, from London to the hills of Somerset and the shops of Liverpool.

There was one precedent for Mr. Chamberlain's decision to go to Germany. Exactly sixty years earlier, in 1878, Disraeli (Lord Beaconsfield), aged seventy-three and a half, attended the Berlin Congress. The chief object of Britain's policy then was to exclude Russia from the Mediterranean by preventing the annihilation of Turkey as an independent state.

Disraeli, like Chamberlain, was subject to bad attacks of gout, and for some days before it was settled that he (with Lord Salisbury) should represent Britain at "the great assize" in Berlin, there were anxious discussions between the Queen and the Prince of Wales as to whether the aging

Prime Minister's health would permit him to attempt the journey; and alternatively whether the scene of the Congress could be moved nearer London.

He allowed four days for the journey. There was no hurry then, and diplomacy still surrounded itself with a certain stateliness. He slept at Calais, Brussels, and Cologne, arriving at Berlin "as fresh as if he was taking his seat in the House of Lords." Chamberlain left Heston Airport at 8:30 A.M. and was at Berchtesgaden at 4:15 the same day. Chamberlain's first interview with Hitler took place over a tea-table—two plainly dressed men, and some aides and secretaries and interpreters. Whereas the Berlin Congress glittered with orders, resounded with titles, and was decorated by ceremonial, precedence, etiquette, and even Royalty. It was the most spectacular gathering of European plenipotentiaries since the Congress of Vienna in 1815. There has been nothing like it since for splendour, nor ever will be again.

The thin, slightly stooping figure of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, stood out among them all as the focal point of power, the most dexterous mentality present, with the strongest will, and above all, the deepest consciousness of his own authority. Bismarck summed up their impressions in his historic remark: "*Der alte Jude, das ist der Mann.*" (The old Jew, that is the man.)

Besides his letters to the Queen, which were despatched regularly, written in the rather flirtatious third person singular which they both employed, Disraeli kept a diary of events in the first person, also for her perusal, which he described as a "rough journal for One Person only." He was always a brilliant letter-writer, and during his sister's lifetime he had brought to a fine art his knack of describing for a loving woman the informal details of his official doings—whom he

spoke to, where he sat, what he ate, what some pretty woman wore, and always some amusing *contretemps*. He wrote to the fifty-nine-year-old Queen at Balmoral much as he had written to Sarah at Bradenham in his young days—surely the most extraordinary correspondence on record between Sovereign and Minister.

". . . At two o'clock the Congress met in the Radzivill Palace—a noble hall just restored and becoming all the golden coats and glittering stars that filled it. Ld. B. believes that every day is not to be so ceremonious and costumish. P. Bismarck, a giant, 6 feet 2 at least, and proportionately huge, was chosen President. In the course of the morn. P. Gortchakoff, a shrivelled old man, was leaning on the arm of his gigantic rival, and, P. Bismarck being seized with a sudden fit of rheumatism, both fell to the ground. Unhappily, P. Bismarck's dog, seeing his master apparently struggling with an opponent, sprang to the rescue. It is said that P. Gortchakoff was not maimed or bitten thro' the energetic efforts of his companion. . . .

"At seven o'clock was a gala banquet at the old Palace; a scene of extraordinary splendour. It is a real Palace, but, strange to say, all the magnificent rooms and galleries of reception are where, in the days of Queen Anne, poor poets used to reside: the garrets. It must have been much more than 100 steps before Lord B. reached the gorgeous scene, and he thinks he must have sunk under it, had not, fortunately, the Master of Ceremonies been shorter-breathed even than himself, so there were many halts of the caravan.

"It was, on the whole, the most splendid scene that Lord B. has ever witnessed. The banquet was in the White Hall. The costumes were singularly various and splendid. Lord B.

sate between Count Andrassy and the Russian Ambassador (Count Shou.) and Andrassy was next to Bismarck. All were opposite the Royal Family. The Crown Princess encouraged him by many kind glances, and the C. Prince and Princess drank to the health of the Queen of England, which Lord B. acknowledged with some agitation. It was the health of one of whom he was almost always thinking. After the banquet, the guests assembled in the gallery. . . .

"*June 14.*—This morning he had a long interview by request with Count Shouvaloff, who, it appears, was rather frightened by the tone, or reported tone, of Lord B. The point was respecting the political and military control by the Sultan over the southern province of Bulgaria. The Russians propose that the Sultan should not be permitted to employ his own army in the government of this part of his dominions. This is outrageous, and to give the Sultan the line of the Balkans for his frontier, and not permit him to defend them, is monstrous and a gross insult to England. Lord B. spoke thunder about it. It will be given up by St. Petersburg.

"Afterwards, a visit to the Empress. She was most kind, and remembered Lord B. at Windsor, etc., etc.

June 17.—Second meeting of Congress. Boundaries of Bulgaria treated by P. Bismarck as the most important question before Congress, and the most difficult. . . .

"In the afternoon at 6 o'clock great dinner at P. Bismarck's. All these banquets are very well done. There must have been sixty guests. The Princess was present. She is not fair to see, tho' her domestic influence is said to be irresistible. I sate on the right of P. Bismarck, and, never caring much to eat in public, I could listen to his Rabelaisian monologues: endless revelations of things he ought not to mention. He impressed on me never to trust Princes or courtiers;

that his illness was not, as people supposed, brought on by the French War, but by the horrible conduct of his Sovereign, etc., etc. In the archives of his family remain the documents, the royal letters, which accuse him after all his services of being a traitor. He went on in such a vein that I was at last obliged to tell him that instead of encountering 'duplicity,' which he said was universal among Sovereigns, I served one who was the the soul of candor and justice, and whom all her Ministers loved.

"The contrast between his voice, which is sweet and gentle, with his ogre-like form, striking. He is apparently well read, familiar with modern literature. His characters of personages extremely piquant. Recklessly frank. . . .

"*June 19*.—An anxious day. The Congress met, but did nothing, as Count Shouvaloff had received no instructions.

"Banquet at the Italian Ambassador, Count de Launay. I sate next to Count Corti. Knowing my man: that he was a favourite of Bismarck, who talked freely to him, and that, as the Ambassador of an almost neutral State, he had the ear of everyone, I told him, in confidence and as an old friend, that I took the gloomiest view of affairs, and that, if Russia would not accept our proposals, I had resolved to break up the Congress. . . .

"*June 21*.—I was engaged today to dine at a grand party at the English Embassy: but, about 5 o'clock, Prince Bismarck called on me and asked how we were getting on, and expressed his anxiety and threw out some plans for a compromise, such as limiting the troops of the Sultan, etc., etc.

"I told him that in London we had compromised this question, and in deference to the feelings of the Emperor of Russia, and it was impossible to recede. 'Am I to understand

it is an ultimatum?' 'You are.' 'I am obliged to go to the Crown Prince now. We should talk over this matter. Where do you dine today?' 'At the English Embassy.' 'I wish you could dine with me. I am alone at 6 o'clock.'

"I accepted his invitation, sent my apology to Lady Odo, dined with Bismarck, the Princess, his daughter, his married niece, and two sons. He was very agreeable indeed at dinner, made no allusion to politics, and, tho' he ate and drank a great deal, talked more.

"After dinner we retired to another room, where he smoked and I followed his example. I believe I gave the last blow to my shattered constitution, but I felt it absolutely necessary. I had an hour and ½ of the most interesting conversation, entirely political; he was convinced that the ultimatum was not a sham, and, before I went to bed, I had the satisfaction of knowing that St. Petersburg had surrendered."

Corry, Disraeli's secretary, records that his chief went so far as to order his special train to be in readiness to carry him back to Calais, when he threatened to break up the Congress rather than give way; and that the ultimatum interview with Bismarck lasted about seven minutes. A week of intense activity and nervous strain brought on an attack of gout, and Disraeli wrote to the Queen on June 23rd:

". . . With regard to myself, I am a little suffering from gout: it came on the night before last. I could have cured it, but there was an important and rather excited Congress yesterday, and I had to speak, which always develops the complaint, so I remain a prisoner, which prevents my passing the day at Potsdam. It is a great loss, but the gentle Princess, who reigns in that fairyland of Rococo, has forgiven me for

my absence, and has graciously sent me fruit and flowers to tell me so.

"I have just observed that in the hurry of writing, in order to gain the messenger, I have violated all etiquette, and addressed my beloved Sovereign in the first person. My first impression was to destroy the letter, and write again by to-morrow's messenger. But a day lost is dreadful, and on the whole, I think it best to throw myself on your Majesty's ever prompt indulgence, and venture to describe myself with all duty and affection, your Majesty's devoted BEACONSFIELD."

The capitulation of Russia broke the back of the business before the Congress, but the sittings and the social functions went on for another fortnight, during which time Disraeli's health became steadily worse, and only his indomitable will made it possible for him to attend the Congress sessions and fight for his terms, after hours "in a recumbent position" to gather strength. The treaty was signed on the 13th of July. He arrived in England with Salisbury on the 16th, and was rapturously received at Dover and on the drive through London to Downing Street.

Disraeli was away five weeks. Mr. Chamberlain was to be gone at the most as many days.

I found it impossible to leave London that Thursday, with so much in the air, and so hung about doing nothing like everybody else. The evening papers reported cheering German crowds standing in the rain as the Prime Minister drove by, and said that he would stay until Sunday. The late news announced that he was returning tomorrow, after "a friendly talk" with Herr Hitler—and that another conference would take place in a few days. It was not reassuring. And yet—

perhaps it was. At least we had those few days. Again I decided to make my trip to the West at once and come back in time for—what?

So I was off to Wells by the nine o'clock train from Paddington on Friday morning. Because I love trains I went and had a second breakfast in the restaurant-car—strong railway tea and beautiful toast and bitter marmalade at a table in a sunny window, with the inevitable newspaper propped up in front of me.

It used to be said that three railways make it difficult to get to Wells, and four would have made it impossible. And William Dean Howells records that his train from Bath to Wells stopped oftener than it started. I was fortunate, I had to change only once, with about an hour's wait, at Frome, pronounced Froom.

Name one outstanding fact concerning Wells: and pencils would scratch busily to set down the enthralling item that the swans which live in the moat of the Bishop's Palace ring a bell when they want to be fed. That is perfectly true. Yes, I have seen them do it, and heard the bell—sheer luck, because no one ever knows when they're going to be hungry. For years off and on I nursed a vague query as to who had started this pretty custom, and when. Nobody seemed to know. The guide-books didn't seem to care. But even as I wrote the first lines of this paragraph I was bitten again by the tantalizing question-mark: How do the swans know food will come? Who taught them?

This page has been in the typewriter some time, while I ransacked my shelves for every book which contained any mention of Wells. A great deal has been written about Wells, and I probably have most of it. And (thanks only to

a man named Shears) I know now who taught the swans to ring the bell.

From 1854 to 1870, when he died in the Palace and was buried in the churchyard near the Cathedral, Bishop Eden, third Baron Auckland, held the see of Bath and Wells. He was moderate in his views, says the Dictionary of National Biography, but inclining to the high church school. He had married Mary, eldest daughter of Francis Edward Hurt of Alderwasley, Derbyshire, "by whom he had a numerous family." And it was one of Bishop Eden's daughters, with time on her hands in that lovely dreaming house within the moat, who with infinite patience contrived to impress on contemporary swan intellects, such as they were, that if you took hold with your beak of the cord which hung out of the window which is only a few feet above the water to the left of the draw-bridge, and gave it a sharp yank, something went ting-aling and manna dropped from heaven. A cord still hangs out of that window, and succeeding generations of swans have never been disappointed, and so they still ring the bell when they're hungry. It's an altogether charming legacy which that otherwise unknown Victorian girl left behind her at Wells.

I can guess what you want to know now. These Edens. There is a young man nowadays named Anthony. Does he fit in? He does, in a loose way. He could probably do it in his head, but I had to work it out on paper, with Burke's Peerage, before I got the answer. Bishop Eden had five daughters. Whichever one of them she was, the lady who fed the swans was first cousin to Anthony's grandfather, if you can make anything of that.

To me the great thing about Wells, the thing I go back each time to see with the same incredulous, glory-stricken

catch of the breath—is the utter stillness of the cathedral, as you first see it from the lawn below the West Front. I know, I know, one does not expect a cathedral to go galumphing about. But Wells has drawn unto itself throughout eight centuries more peace, more beauty, more serenity—more stillness. It has somehow the enchanted immobility of the Sleeping Beauty, who was yet alive; the enchanted silence of music which has only just ceased to be heard.

The long green velvet lawn beneath the West Front was once a cemetery. That may have something to do with the quietness which descends upon you as you approach across the grass. Never come to Wells Cathedral blindly, by the north porch, which is the entrance. Come humbly, and very slowly, down the green, while the beauty of the façade literally grows before your eyes until at last you stand, very small, on the gravelled path which runs past the closed west doors to the north—until you stand looking up and up at those rows of stone figures, nearly six hundred of them, in 13th century costumes, and each one a separate personality with a separate significance in the mind of the man who carved it. Once this stone company was coloured and gilded like a page from a Book of Hours. The paint is all gone now, they are all grey stone, and some of them are mutilated and some are missing. But there is no sadness and no sense of ruin at Wells. Only a gentle aging, like one's mother's face.

It has always been a fortunate cathedral, compared to most of its sisters, with a very simple history. It is a century younger than Glastonbury, but there has been a church at Wells since 704. The Dissolution and the Civil War passed lightly over it, by some miracle. Young Monmouth's

men used it as a stable in 1685, but it survived that indignity too.

You follow the path round Kill Canon Corner—named for the icy blasts which are encountered there in winter—to the entrance in the north porch. People come especially to see the famous clock, which was made by a Glastonbury monk, and bears the motto: *Ne quid pereat.* (Lest anything perish.) But the real reason for going inside is the inverted arches beneath the tower. I can never quite believe it till I see them again. But yes, there they are, as perfect as ever and as incredibly lovely.

It is surprising to learn that the builders didn't do it on purpose, but they didn't. The arches were added nearly a hundred years after the building was planned, and some twenty years after the central tower had gone up without them. The four great piers which stand at the crossing to support the tower were in danger of collapse, and the 14th century workmen solved the problem of support in a unique and to me fascinating way.

Eventually I returned to the market place and took a big blue bus for Glastonbury. The road is broad and white and modern, and runs blandly through little grey villages in a soft English landscape bordered by the low wall of the Mendips behind you. This is the road which old Abbot Whiting travelled to and from his trial in Wells; the road too, along which he had set out in his youth for Cambridge University, for he was Glastonbury born.

Abbot Whiting was the greatest and last tragedy of the Dissolution. He was very old, and had been Abbot of Glastonbury for fourteen years when Henry VIII turned robber in 1539. He was a good abbot, and faithful to his trust. His only offence was trying to hide from the King's agents the

treasure belonging to his abbey and by that token to his God. He was arrested at his manor at Sharpham; there was the usual farce of a trial—his was held in the banqueting hall which is now a ruined shell in the daisy-starred grass behind the Bishop's Palace at Wells. He was deaf, and ill, and without counsel. They accused him also of harbouring a book which contained unwise remarks on the always sore point of the Succession. To the list of charges against him Thomas Cromwell added a line of written instruction: "See the evidence be well sorted and the indictments well drawn." It was murder. But Henry never stuck at that. In mid-November the frail old man was taken on a hurdle like a common criminal to the top of Glastonbury Tor, hanged, drawn and quartered, and his head was set above the Abbey gate to look down on the gutted church he had loved.

All the way to Glastonbury in the crowded, swaying bus I entertained, or was entertained by one of those busy minds which can happen to anybody now and then, and which goes scurrying round in your memory bringing up poignant mental pictures, and nagging you with old joys or half-forgotten sadnesses. There does not seem to be any quick or sure escape from it once it starts.

Ten years, I was thinking, since I first came to Glastonbury. There were four of us then. It was inevitable that the fact that I was travelling alone now should produce a further melancholy, although all the other three were perfectly fit and fairly happy and recently heard from. It was equally inevitable that a return to the scene of early days in a still flourishing marriage should induce a certain nostalgia. And I found it very touching to remember that ten years ago we had drunk hot rum in the lounge of the Pilgrims' Inn—the evenings were chilly that May—before we went

up to bed, with appropriate remarks from the two who were to occupy the room with Henry VIII's name painted on its door.

We had come in late from an expedition in the twilight. The streets beyond the Tribunal as you go up the High Street past St. John's Church in its trim green yard, become low and bare and brick, and will lead you, if you keep to the right, to the Abbot's Barn, which stands alone on the edge of things, collects no fee, and has no official guide. We came upon it first in the slow English dusk. And as soon as we turned off the pavement towards it we were overtaken by a hovering half-dozen small children, whose bedtime it certainly was, and who babbled dates and local history in a soft, well-trained chorus. They all knew the story of the Abbot's barn and they all told it, down to the toddling infant led by a serious, spectacled little girl who had already the insistent, glittering eye of the born guide. The infant punctuated her smooth stream of facts with corroborative murmurings of his own, which went on unheeded in the gentle babel of juvenile erudition. The performance called for the coppers of our entire party, and then the unsmiling, responsible little party of dimly seen voices retired, faintly chinking, into the twilight.—It is a noble barn.

The grinding halt and start of the big blue bus roused me from all this contemplation of a not entirely vanished youth. Between me and the window sat an attractive young woman of the hatless, short-haired, clean-faced country type which England does so well, reading a paper-covered book. Her hands clasped it ungracefully, coarse, not well kept, and disproportionately large—the hands of the woman she would be fifteen years hence. The print was fine and hard to read at a distance, but partly because an open book is irre-

sistible temptation, and partly to hinder the scamperings of a too lively memory, I did a lot of peeking.

It was sheer servant-girl fiction at sixpence a volume. The heroine's name was of course Muriel, and where I began—two thirds of the way through the book—she was being forcibly confided in by a man (presumably the hero) who had just committed a murder. "But think, think what you are saying!" Muriel was entreating him. "It cannot be! There must be some mistake!" "No, no, believe me, it is the dreadful truth!" he groaned. And it seemed as though he ought to know.

She turned the page, I raised my eyes to the window, and the Tor was already in sight. That abrupt round hill which rises out of the surrounding meadows with the tiny tower on top is always unexpected and hard to believe. It can be seen from such surprising distances and angles, and it looks so artificial, like an operatic back-drop.

This is the vale of Avalon—holiest earth in England—trodden by St. Joseph of Arimathea, St. Patrick of Ireland, St. Dunstan, St. Bridget, St. David—and before them the Druids and the old, old gods. It was here that Arthur came to die—

> "To the island valley of Avillion,
> Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
> Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
> Deep meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns,
> And bowery billows crowned with summer sea. . . ."

And here, when Guinevere had died repentant in her nunnery, Lancelot brought her body to lie at the feet of the master they had wronged.

To begin to write about Glastonbury is to walk into a

trap most delicately baited. It means that one goes on writing for pages, and then realizes with mortification that nothing one has written is of any use at all. To tear it up and start again is no good. The same divine dissatisfaction will set in, the same despair, the same impatient snow of fragments into the waste-paper basket.

When I was planning this book I promised myself a chapter about Glastonbury. I had read so many books, I had so much zeal, I was so full of knowledge, memories, and eager words. I have put the books all back on the shelf. I have laid away notes an inch deep. It is not defeat. It is not failure. It is a renunciation—that is not too big a word—very hard to make. If you have been there, I don't have to tell you why. If ever you go there, and you could not do better once the world is put to rights again, you will understand.

Accept, then, with my apologies, a few mere jottings not worthy of the place, and let me off the rest.

The market place of Glastonbury village is now broad and tidy, its modern Gothic cross rising patiently from a bald area of pavement. The grave façade of the Pilgrims' Inn, more officially known as the George, contrives to look unchanged and unrestored. Its inside is exactly as it should be. There is a parlour full of old oak, a fireplace full of old blue-and-white tile; the china is blue and white; the teas are lavish, the service deft and friendly. You never leave it without promising yourself that you will come back. I myself have learned how many, many times you must come back.

There was a time, not long ago as Glastonbury counts up years, when the ruined Abbey lay behind its forgetful little town with only a crooked alley leading to it from the market-

place. An inn masked its ancient gateway, since restored. In those days you could go to the ruins in broad daylight, openly and presumably unashamed, and bring away as much stone as you wanted, or until you got tired; not as souvenirs, but to make a foundation for your new barn, or to mend a bad bit of road on the way to your favourite pub, or to fill up a hole in your chicken run. That tragic, travelled highway to Wells, with its thrilling bend above the Tor, was kept in good repair for years with the broken stone of Glastonbury Abbey, which when King Henry's men had quite finished with it became a sort of free neighbourhood quarry —a not unusual fate for church buildings which stood in the path of those two self-righteous whirlwinds, Henry VIII and Oliver Cromwell.

At the end of the 18th century, when the Puritans in their turn had quite finished with it too, the Abbey fell into the hands of a Presbyterian, who took a zealous pride in its further defacement, and who for the glory of his faith continued to scatter its stones as the heretics scattered the bones of saints. Finally in 1907 it was purchased for the Established Church. No doubt soon after that the little turnstile was put up, and immediately there followed the open-faced souvenir shop which sells the same brass bells and paperweights to be found in York and Canterbury and Land's End. And lastly arrived the people who dig up smooth green turf with spades.

They were at it one summer when I was there—slowly shortening the green vista of the nave which in 1928 had stretched all the way from St. Joseph's chapel to the High Altar. Next time I came, about three years later, half way to the great central arch a dissolute picket fence leaned askew, waist high and futile. A kindly notice-board tacked

to it endeavoured to make you understand something of what was happening inside, and something of what had already happened before it came. A large square excavation had been made east of St. Joseph's chapel. Its bank near the fence was shoulder high to a man who stood where the raw earth was being cut away. I read the notice-board for the second time, and my eyes retreated from it to the silent, leafy arch of trees across the roofless nave—to the silent, broken arch of stone which cast its slim shadow on what was left of the green turf. I could muster very little enthusiasm for old pavement levels. . . .

I forgave them, though, in the end. Two men were there that day, on the other side of the fence, who had more right in Glastonbury than any tourist, because they knew so much more. One was a largish, thickish man in a smooth brown suit, with a walking-stick carried at a jaunty angle across his shoulder; and the other was a slender, tweeded man in an excited soft hat, who plainly looked up to him.

I watched them prowling up and down just inside the bank, among half a dozen leisurely workmen who handled their tools neatly and treated each inch of disturbed earth with deep respect. The two men prowled, shoulder to shoulder, the stick moving bayonetwise above the bank, the soft hat pulled low. The big one was talking steadily, inaudibly, and now and then they looked at each other and laughed, without making a sound. They liked one another, and they were having a beautiful time. I turned away, so as not to stare with too hungry a gaze across the crazy little fence.

When I looked again they were all gathered in a near corner, looking down. The big one sat precariously upon the handle of his stick, watching. His feet were at a reckless angle to the stick, and its point sank into the soft clay. He

preserved a perfect balance, watching. . . . The tweeded man had squatted on his heels and was working eagerly at the old brown earth with his fingers.

I don't know what it was. I had to catch a train from Bath.

Once more in 1938 I paid my sixpence at the turnstile and approached the Abbey slowly, with a querulous eye alert for meddlesome changes while my back had been turned. It was the pleasantest surprise. All the turf was laid again. They had put everything back, the fence was gone, the workmen were gone—just long white stripes of stone in the grass to mark their precious pavement lines, and I suppose things in a museum somewhere. It looked lovelier even than I had been able to remember it—the exquisite broken arches casting shadows on the green—the length of it—the *size* of it—the peace and the dignity of it—blasphemy outlived and shamed and redeemed again to holiness and beauty. . . . With an aching throat I drifted down the sunflecked nave towards the High Altar.

5. *The "Fateful Pause"*

I WENT back to London by train that same Friday night. I had by no means finished in the West Country, but I wanted the week-end in London, for no reason that I can produce now—unless it was the Bath newspaper, the only Bath evening newspaper, which I read at dinner at the Empire Hotel.

The *Bath and Wilts Chronicle and Herald* was established in the year 1776, and it carries as its sub-title, "The Evening Newspaper for North & Mid-Somerset, Wiltshire, & South Gloucester." This would be the paper Jane Austen and Horatio Nelson depended on for news. During its lifetime it must have printed the latest from Yorktown, Trafalgar, Waterloo, Sebastopol, Mafeking, and the Marne. It now made mention of a place called Godesberg, "near Cologne, a favourite resort of Herr Hitler's."

The more I searched its skimpy pages, the more I wanted tomorrow morning's *Telegraph* in London. Not but what the *Bath and Wilts Chronicle and Herald* had the news. There was a two-column spread about the Berchtesgaden visit, and a sub-head: "Outlook Appears Promising." It said that Mr. Chamberlain was expected to arrive in London about 5 P.M. It was seven o'clock as I read. The London train left at 7:57, and I was in it.

On Saturday morning the Prague correspondents were

reporting a revulsion of feeling among members of the Sudeten party. One of them quoted a letter received from a Sudeten functionary, as follows: "Conrad Henlein has betrayed us by going far beyond anything for which we ever gave him a mandate. The population demanded self-government, but never did more than a minority desire secession to Germany, to whom we Sudeten Germans have never belonged. To talk of 'going home to the Reich' has no meaning for most of us."

That seemed plain enough.

The Saturday papers were noticeably irked by a lack of communicativeness on the part of the Cabinet, but most of them conceded that Government reticence at such a time was advisable in a country where the Opposition is not only tolerated but actually paid to oppose; and at a time when the Opposition seemed to be more than usually irresponsible. The basic tradition of the English House of Commons Opposition is unfathomable and misleading to the mentality of the totalitarian states in any circumstances.

"A FATEFUL PAUSE" was the strangely dramatic headline above the *Telegraph* leader. Something must have been accomplished but one hardly knew what to hope for. It was now, on the 17th, that the Umbrella made its Press debut, in a simple routine cartoon by Strube which showed a front passage and the inside of a front door with its letter-basket, and a hat-rack which held a trilby hat and a rolled umbrella; beneath it was the caption: "He's back." We smiled. Back safe. There were also photographs in all the papers of an apparently unfatigued Prime Minister who viewed without visible misgivings another trip across the Channel within a few days, remarking only that next time Herr Hitler would come part of the way to meet him. One picture with an al-

most deliberately comic grin carried the quotes that he (Hitler) "wishes to spare an old man another long journey."

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(I noticed, after my return to America, an unexpected preoccupation among the people who questioned me about my end of the Crisis. They wanted to know *when* I first heard so and so, and *how* I first learned this and that. They wanted to see the English newspaper cuttings as I organized the material I had thrown into my trunk without any real idea what use I would ever make of it.—One night I was so fed up and sick of the whole thing that I threw away several days' newspapers and have had to fill in the gap since. —"We didn't get that here," people would say, pointing to some such item as the Sudeten letter quoted above. "I never knew—we didn't understand—it never occurred to us—"

(This is not to criticize unduly the American Press or radio. I wouldn't have thought it overlooked a thing. But the viewpoint was bound to be different, the accent was bound to fall sometimes in a different place, and there were bound to be omissions as well as exaggerations.

(During the winter of 1938 I heard the British Press and the BBC denounced as being not entirely as "free" as they claimed to be. Sometimes I heard rather violent allegations that it was just as much "controlled" and "inspired" as any other European Press. Of course it was not entirely free. It was merely, in 1938, as free as any Press in the world, and less subject than the newsprint and airwaves of the U. S. A. to domination by over-articulate little people with little axes to grind and little bees in their bon-

nets. And it is certainly never "controlled" in the sense of being forbidden to criticize the actions of the Government—which it does most outspokenly whenever it feels like it—nor restrained from quoting the opinions of foreign papers when those opinions are unfavourable to Britain. It was on my London papers that I depended the year round for European Press quotations, which were often not regarded as worth space in our domestic papers if there was an election or a murder trial on here. The BBC was even criticized in very reputable British quarters for allotting too much time in its broadcasts to quoting blasts of unfriendly foreign rhetoric.

(What we had read in London day by day as the 1938 Crisis developed—what we had said to each other over the teacups—what we had heard in the streets and shops—what we had hoped and what we had dreaded—these things in their proper sequence seemed to matter when we came to cast up accounts in the winter breathing spell.)

✦

Daladier arrived on Sunday the 18th for a conference in Downing Street. There appeared to be a new grip on the situation, in spite of no actual news. "On Wednesday at midday," wrote "Scrutator" in the *Times*, "it seemed that if the drift continued a few hours longer there would be no hope. War it would have been if Mr. Chamberlain had not acted or had allowed any formality to interpose delay in his resolution, once formed. For gallantry and courage one can recall no parallel in our history to his mission of peace to Berchtesgaden."

Sunday was the last day of summer holidays, and chil-

dren were to be sent back to school during the coming week. This would hardly have added to the general good cheer on that otherwise over-burdened day.

There was a thing which Kipling would have liked. Just at this time the Maharajah of Bikanir, aged fifty-eight, ruler of the seventh largest state of India, declared that it was a mistake for anyone to think that India would not rally to Britain's aid. He sent a telegram to the Viceroy, a long and magnificently worded message of loyalty, which read in part:

"In the event, God forbid, of war in which Great Britain may be compelled to enter, I take this earliest opportunity of placing unreservedly at his Imperial Majesty's command my own sword and the services of my troops and the entire resources of the Bikanir State. . . . My army, though small in numbers, is ready to proceed wherever required at a moment's notice, and eagerly solicits the honour of once again fighting for his Imperial Majesty should war unhappily break out. Although not as young as in 1914, or in as good health, and although various important matters, including the agricultural situation, may not render it possible for me to stay away from my State for an indefinite period, I would earnestly beg that I, too, may not be left inactive in India, and that I may once again be afforded an opportunity to fight for my beloved Emperor. . . ."

Bikanir fought in France, Egypt and Palestine during the Great War, and is a full (honorary) General in the Indian Army. Ninety-seven more Indian States under native rulers lined up behind the ruler of Bikanir within the next few days. They each represented individual offers, for

each Indian State has a separate treaty with the Crown, and so each native Prince feels himself in personal touch with the King-Emperor.

The Cenotaph was heaped with flowers that Sunday. One little bunch was tied up with string and had a card which read: "In memory of Uncle Percy, from Cedric and Valerie." The writing was a child's.

Monday passed somehow, with rumours that Henlein had skipped into Germany. One paper remarked that there was "evidence that those Sudeten 'martyrs' who don't want to be martyred in a war are retreating from the extreme position thrust upon them by Hitler, through Henlein." In Whitehall, outside the Cabinet Room, there were demonstrations—the orderly demonstrations of England—and cries of "Stop the war!" and "Stand by the Czechs!"

On Tuesday the Czech Government accepted the peace plan based on the Berchtesgaden talks. Prague was dazed and resentful, and Labour raised a cry of betrayal. Hospital and school evacuation plans were given a good deal of space in the papers, as Mr. Chamberlain was announced to be off for Godesberg on Thursday. "Italy has never been so strong on land, sea, and in the air," boasted Mussolini. "We are proud that we are feared."

Wednesday was dark and rainy and cold. I woke with the whole thing sitting on my chest, and after a futile morning there was suddenly only one thing that I wanted to do. On the morning of the Prime Minister's first departure for Germany all the papers had carried the announcement that Westminster Abbey would be open continuously for unbroken intercession and silent prayer, at the tomb of the Unknown Warrior. Mrs. Chamberlain had gone there after

seeing the Prime Minister off, and knelt unrecognized beside the tomb.

On Wednesday, wearing a regulation English tweed skirt and hat, a suède jacket and brogues, I took a bus into Victoria Street and approached the side entrance of Westminster Abbey on foot.

"Then longen folk to gon on pilgrimages,"

trickled through my brain as I crossed the Broad Sanctuary in a pouring rain. You don't make pilgrimages by taxi, and I was headed for the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in a most un-modern humility of spirit.

A simple black and white placard on the railings reserved the West Door for "the use of those partaking in the Intercession." The vestibule gave on a blank red curtain instead of another door, and as I laid hold of it it was fumbled at from the other side, and then parted under my hand. I stood face to face with a thin, stooping man of any age from forty to sixty who was on his way out. For a moment, fumbling at the curtain, he blocked my path squarely without apology, and glancing up into his face I saw that the myriad wrinkles round his tired blue eyes were glistening with tears. He stood in my way because he could not see to pass me. Perhaps he had lost a son in the Great War. Perhaps he had sons to lose in this one. Certainly he knew, at first hand, what war itself could mean to a man in the trenches. I left the curtain in his hand and slipped past him, into the Abbey.

The Tomb, a flat slab let into the floor, had been railed off from the rest of the nave at the far end, and on the other three sides of it kneeling-chairs had been set several rows deep. A silent verger in a black gown handed me a

printed paper from a sheaf in his hand. I took it automatically and went on to the end of the nearest row, and became one of the motionless, kneeling figures round the Tomb. . . .

BENEATH THIS STONE RESTS THE BODY
OF A BRITISH WARRIOR
UNKNOWN BY NAME OR RANK
BROUGHT FROM FRANCE TO LIE AMONG
THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS OF THE LAND
AND BURIED HERE ON ARMISTICE DAY
11 NOV: 1920 IN THE PRESENCE OF
HIS MAJESTY KING GEORGE V
HIS MINISTERS OF STATE
THE CHIEFS OF HIS FORCES
AND A VAST CONCOURSE OF THE NATION

THUS ARE COMMEMORATED THE MANY
MULTITUDES WHO DURING THE GREAT
WAR OF 1914-1918 GAVE THE MOST
THAT MAN CAN GIVE LIFE ITSELF
FOR GOD
FOR KING AND COUNTRY
FOR LOVED ONES HOME AND EMPIRE
FOR THE SACRED CAUSE OF JUSTICE AND
THE FREEDOM OF THE WORLD

More than half the chairs were occupied. Gradually the constriction in my throat eased, a small corner of my brain became articulate. You must take this in, it was saying. This is something you have never seen or felt before—something no one will ever believe who has not experienced it. This

has nothing to do with the Church, or with creed, or with politics—nothing to do with fear or prejudice or propaganda —nothing to do even with hope or despair. This is a nation and its God.

I have tried to remember how it was. There was a smell of wet umbrellas, wet fur, and wet tweed, and cold stone. There was no incense, no music, almost no sound. No sound, except two or three times a long-drawn, half-stifled breath that was not quite a sob, and that never came twice from the same place. Now and then with a small rustle of cloth someone would rise and go, or someone would come in and kneel. But most of them seemed to have been there a long time, and to have no thought of going. I became conscious of the woman next to me. She was expensively dressed in black, with silver fox. Her hands, in black kid gloves, were held up before her face. Her body was slim and young, and quivering with sobs which never became audible. In the row in front of her a stout, middle-aged woman in tailored tweeds—up from the country, one thought instinctively—was kneeling upright and reading with an almost aggressive interest the printed paper handed out by the verger near the door. *Suggestions for Silent Intercession during these days of crisis*, was its title. Soon she dismissed it, and leaned her head humbly on her hand against the railing. Someone blew his nose loudly, beyond and to the right. There was a slight stir on my left and a very young man and a girl slid to their knees beside me, hand in hand, their faces lifted to the candles which burned above the Tomb. Hers was pale and childlike and calm, framed in fair hair. Their clasped hands never parted while they prayed. . . .

It is either pathetic or infuriating that the Church feels it necessary in these unregenerate times to print a guide to

teach people how to pray. The *Suggestions for Silent Intercession* were explicit, "remembering that in intercession we are not trying to tell God what He ought to do. We are seeking all the time that His will may be done." (I fancy the woman in grey tweeds had stopped reading just about there.) "My soul, be thou silent unto God . . . the Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him. . . . Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief . . . O righteous Lord that lovest righteousness look in mercy upon our bewildered and distracted world. . . ." It is very lovely and dignified, the official language of prayer. But an ill-disciplined, unreasoning something inside me was making a much simpler plea: "Not yet! Not now! Not *again*. . . ."

When I went I paused a moment inside the door, looking back. The verger, youngish and level-eyed, was still handing out the printed *Suggestions* of the Established Church. People brushed past me on their way in. At the far end of the Tomb enclosure, where the railing ran between it and the rest of the Abbey, a group of visitors stood watching the silent company on the kneeling chairs. In a knot a little apart were five or six unmistakable Germans—sightseers, members of the visiting football team, or (though not in uniform) some of the ex-Service-men delegation then in London. They stood close together in attitudes of frozen motion, staring—seeming about to depart, yet immobile, rooted, at gaze—their faces had the wistful blankness of a hungry waif's at a confectioner's window—fascinated, hypnotized, and enthralled by the sight of a free nation praying to its God.

I came out into the rain in what is still known as the Broad Sanctuary, though the privilege of refuge was abolished by James I. It was mid-afternoon. A dozen people,

singly or in pairs, were converging on the doorway with one intent. This was going on day and night without a break. The door was never closed, the candles went on burning. The Premier was off again tomorrow for another try, prepared to pay a terrible price for peace. Would we have peace then, at last?

We were fast becoming fatalists in our daily doings. We continued business as usual so far as we could without laying plans. Anyway, nobody could do anything at the moment except Neville Chamberlain. So I decided to return to the West Country on Friday and get on with it, while he was at Godesberg.

This time I managed to collect Dorothy Marmont to go with me. It was as near as we could come to the original foursome, and somehow I convinced her that even though Percy was beginning rehearsals for a new play and the two girls' school plans were still unsettled, a brief escape from London strain was what she needed. Once she had consented to go, things perked up considerably. She is one of those rare ideal travelling companions. She likes and understands guide-books, knows history, and is never too tired or too hungry or too bored to see all there is to see. Her laughter bubbles like a schoolgirl's.

It was a 9 A.M. train from Paddington, but not even that got us down. We left the morning papers on the seat in our compartment—they carried startling details of a devastating hurricane in the New England states; even the weather was going mad—and went into the restaurant-car and ordered tea and toast and marmalade. When it came, just as the wheels began to turn, we looked at each other across the table as though school had just let out. We agreed, as we poured out our tea, that the start of a railway journey,

however small and unimportant, is always more deeply satisfying than the loading of a motor car for a tour, or the sailing of a ship. And ours was not a small journey, because we were going all the way to Bath, where we would arrive at 11:04.

Pale sunlight lay on the white cloth between us and caught the well-polished railway silver. The thick, beautiful toast was still hot enough to melt the butter. The marmalade was even the right brand. Outside the windows there were bright little gardens either side of the line. It wasn't going to rain. Three cheers for our side.

Neither of us had felt so gay and happy and carefree—so *young*—in weeks.

At some station along the way after we had returned to our compartment, probably Swindon, a very small boy in a school cap was put into the compartment by a woman who was presumably his mother. Their parting was completely without demonstration of any kind. As the door closed, and he settled to his journey, I noticed that he had been provided with a candy-bar and a picture-paper. He spread out the latter on the seat beside him and became absorbed. "PRAYS TO MARRY MURDERER IN PRISON" in big black type faced "CHILDREN TO LEAVE FIRST IN AIR RAID." He read them both, every word, with a poker face. I found myself hoping she *wasn't* his mother. He got out alone, so far as we could see unmet, at some place like Chippenham. "Why not give the child something *cheerful* to read?" said Dorothy, out of my own thoughts.

Our plan was to hire a car at Bath and go out into the Mendip Hills in search of Dolebury Camp, Priddy, and Wookey Hole, which lay the other side of Cheddar. I didn't need Cheddar for the book, but we just threw it in for good

measure. It was on the way. We made a serious mistake about the car. Instead of going to a hotel and getting one of their cars, we accepted advice at the station and took one there. When it was too late to call off the deal without being too obvious, we realized that the driver was as deaf as a beetle. To this day, and onwards, we regret our softheartedness. The man had no business to be driving so much as a luggage-trolley. He knew nothing about the countryside, couldn't read a map when it was shoved under his nose, couldn't understand what Dolebury was at all—and was shy and furtive like a rabbit.

Dolebury? It is a pre-Roman earthwork in the centre of the Mendip lead-mining district. It has an inner wall of unmortared stone, and the plateau in the middle is scarred with old mine-workings. It is utterly desolate and abandoned, and so old that it makes you ache. I wanted to go there. Dorothy, having thoroughly assimilated the idea, wanted to go there. We set out, north and west from Bath, and I think the driver was looking for a place with tents. The only way to stop him, or turn him, was to poke him in the back, at which he would tramp on all the pedals and the car would come to an abrupt halt, while we shouted. Pretty soon it began to be funny and then we didn't mind any more.

This is to report that we never got to Dolebury. We saw it. We drove up and down and all around it. But we never got there. That is, we never set foot on the top of the hill, which remained inaccessible on the other side of a deep wooded ravine, no matter how we circled and turned. We met nobody to ask. And the man at the wheel does not understand to this day that the bare top of the hill we kept pointing to and pleading for was Dolebury Camp.

It got to be one-thirty in the afternoon and still we had not found the entrance to Dolebury. The driver's lunch began to sit heavy on our consciences. After two he could not get a beer with it. We knew we oughtn't to keep him longer on the road. So we turned him towards Cheddar.

The town where we had lunch lies between Dolebury and Cheddar and should remain nameless if I tell the truth about it. The inn was dirty and run down—the first and only really dirty and unappetizing place I have ever found in England with an AA sign on it; or possibly it was an RAC sign. The upholstery in the lounge was unspeakable, the smell from the bar knocked you down, and the establishment was apparently run by a handsome and rather refined-looking woman with a queenly stature and lovely greying hair—who wore, at 1:45 or so in the afternoon, a floor-length purple crêpe dress with bell-shaped sleeves, and was excessively charming and glad to see us. Her second-in-command was a healthy-looking country-wench in blue cotton—not clean, either the girl or the dress—also very charming. They would cook us a mixed grill with pleasure. (When in doubt, order a mixed grill. The chances are the chop will be eatable, and it won't have stood round in the flies as a joint might have done.) In the meantime, would we like to go out into the garden? The bar smell was so overpowering that we accepted the garden with gratitude.

The garden climbed straight up a weed-grown hill at the back, beyond a sagging wooden fence. It consisted of some cabbages and currant bushes. We stood about in it for an interminable time, until we thought the grill might be ready. The dining-room was dark, but the linen was moderately fresh. Through the open kitchen door we could see an undersized, under-fed-looking waitress in a black dress and white

apron assembling our meal. When her arm came down over my shoulder with the plate I saw that the sleeve was green with age and spotted, with a ragged seam. Her manners were charming. Everybody was charming. You never saw such charming people.

The food proved to be impossible. The chop was raw, the green beans were mud-coloured and tasted like wood, the sausage was doubtful, and the grilled tomato was black at the edges. The tea, as always, was good. We pushed the mixed grill round the plates a bit and then asked to finish off with bread and cheese.

The waitress was terribly concerned that we hadn't eaten the grill, and when we said the chops were a little underdone for our taste she offered to get us something else. We couldn't imagine what that might be, and said politely that with bread and cheese we would be quite all right. The cotton-clad girl came and was sorry that we hadn't liked the grill. When they had both gone we scraped black dust off the cheese and ate it, with more tea. The bill was 2/6, and we tipped the worried little waitress. The lady in the purple dress, polishing glasses in the bar, saw us off with a friendly, unembarrassed smile. We're still at sea about the whole thing.

Furthermore, Cheddar was much nearer than we had thought, and we could have lunched there like lords.

It's no good trying to describe Cheddar Gorge. It is England's Grand Canyon. It must be seen to be believed. It is so sudden, even when you have been expecting it for miles, even when you have seen pictures of it and made up your mind exactly what it will be like. Dorothy said that even when you had seen it before, as she had done, you weren't prepared for it next time. It doesn't last long, and that's

another shock. Suddenly you are out into England again, on a normal English road running along the foot of the Mendips.

But even after Cheddar, Wookey was the prize packet of the day. A glance at the map told me that Wookey Hole, which is a cave where prehistoric human remains have come to light, was on the left of the main road, and Wookey Village, unreasonably, on the right. Both are out of sight as you approach from Cheddar. It was with some difficulty therefore that we persuaded the driver, thoroughly shattered now by the last hill in the Cheddar region, to ignore the village signpost and turn left for the caves.

Except to an archaeologist here and there, the idea of the age of Wookey is really too much to be borne. A printed page can say to me suddenly: There were glaciers in Wales; lions and elephants and grizzly bears and hairy rhinoceroses and hyaenas lived in Somersetshire; there were woods and pastures where the Dogger Bank is now; the Thames flowed into the Rhine and they both flowed into the Atlantic, and there was no English Channel at all. And my mind just sits there, staring at the printed page, and whimpers, and won't assimilate. Years which run into five figures B.C. are demoralizing to a mere historian.

But there was a time, before man had learnt to polish his flint weapons and weave himself cloth to wear, when England was not an island, and the wild beasts from the Continent had only to ford a stream, about where Dover is now, to find themselves in what was to become Kent and Sussex. And, with nothing to stop them, they roamed westward and crossed the Mendip Hills, where the glaciers never came. So that a mammoth from the valley of the Rhine, pursued by the hyaena pack in the failing light of some Paleolithic

afternoon, could break his leg in a plunge over a sheer cliff two hundred feet high at the source of the Axe and be killed and eaten there. And it would not have comforted him much, nor mattered to the furtive, hairy, hungry family of man who dined on the leavings when the pack had gone, that that snapped-off leg-bone would survive to tell the story of his prehistoric fall some fifty thousand years later.

Yes, there were men in England before it was an island, because someone lit fires on the floor of the cave to assert his right of possession against the beasts—who did not possess fire. "We do not know"—the archaeologists are speaking—"we do not know" what man's relation was to the tremendous change which occurred in southern England, causing every estuary from the Severn to the Thames to submerge, and resulting in the formation of the English Channel. But man was there somewhere, low of stature and forehead, clad in skins, and quite unable to appreciate his profound good fortune as he became an islander. Being man, he was likewise unable at a much later date, and in a somewhat higher state of civilization, to anticipate the consequences of the invisible bridge flung across his ancient friend the Channel by a fellow named Bleriot. England has been an island for five hundred centuries. But now the continental mammoths need not even get their feet wet fording a stream.

In case you have found the contemplation of Wookey Hole a shade depressing, I should like to remind you of a story which begins thus:

"Once upon a most early time was a Neolithic Man. He was not a Jute or an Angle, or even a Dravidian, which he might well have been, Best Beloved, but never mind why. He was a Primitive, and he lived cavily in a Cave, and he

wore very few clothes, and he couldn't read and he couldn't write and he didn't want to, and except when he was hungry he was quite happy. . . ."

You will find it in the works of Rudyard Kipling.

The parking and refreshment accommodations at Wookey Hole are quite impressive. There is a sort of rustic pavilion where you can eat, and our indigestible luncheons rankled inside us as we beheld it. There is a museum and a souvenir shop. I am not one of those who sneer wholesale at souvenir shops. It is not necessary to buy hideous postcards and mass production brass door-knockers in them, any more than it is necessary to eat Brighton Rock at Brighton. There is nearly always something for sale which is intrinsically local and which will hold some small warmth of association if not of real beauty for a bleak time in the always uncertain future. At Wookey there is a country-made pottery, and a fat blue cream-jug which pours from the side found its way into my heart for about one and ninepence. And sometimes at winter breakfasts, with dirty snow in the streets of New York outside the windows, the cereal is sweetened by the thought of Wookey on that grey September day when for as much as a whole hour together we were able to forget the things it is necessary to forget in order to be happy in these years of grace.

We left the driver—entirely bewildered and looking as though he ought to be taken away somewhere and buried—we left him in the car and with sighs of relief escaped on foot to follow a path which a signpost said would take us to the Cave.

There were flowerbeds and rustic benches at intervals along the left of the path. After a while we began to see

why. But we kept on walking. On the right the ground fell away dramatically to the river bed in a deep ravine obscured by a tangle of vegetation. An indescribable thumping sound proved to be the paper mill which has been there, parasitizing the River Axe, for two hundred years at least. It was during improvements to the water supply for the mill a couple of generations ago that further discoveries of prehistoric remains were made, and much light was shed on the inhabitants of the caves.

We went on walking.

The gradient of the path itself was nothing much, but the scenery either side shot up into steep hillsides, so that on that sunless afternoon we moved in a sort of green-clad twilight which became very effective. Two or three times we met two or three exhausted-looking people coming back. Still there was nothing in sight except more path, more rustic benches, and more hillside, which by now could be described as towering. Tea time crossed my mind—would we ever see it? (After that lunch we had promised ourselves a bang-up tea at Wells.)

"Really, I had no idea it would be as far as this—" I said apologetically, and my voice had a hollow sound in the green gloom.

"It's all right—I don't mind," said Dorothy over her shoulder. The nice part was, she didn't. Her neat little feet tapped on resolutely along the path in front of me. Every line of her back was alive with curiosity. Not a word about tea. What a pal.

Suddenly we saw it.

The grey stone of the sheer cliff face was draped with ivy, ferns, and brambles, with no gleam of sunlight to bring the sky near. The River Axe emerged quietly from a black

hole at the base of the rock wall, which seemed to rise and overhang us much more than its statistical two hundred feet. The path we stood on ran spang into a smaller hole above and to the left. Not a leaf stirred, while we stood and looked.

The Lost World plateau was higher, no doubt, and wider, and there was no rustic railing, no path, and nobody at the end of it in a peaked cap waiting to collect your shilling. But on that heavy-laden, truant day towards what threatened to be the end of the world, it was good enough.

If you persist with the story of Wookey you will come at last to a recognizable date. Some two hundred years before Caesar landed on the coast of Kent, a tribe from Brittany may have sailed up the Severn estuary and followed the Axe to its source in the glen—and were perhaps peacefully received by the more backward Bronze Age people of the Mendips. There was plenty of game, and the more savage beasts had mostly disappeared. Man had now learned to spin and weave and to decorate his pottery, which he still made without the wheel. Brooches, ear-rings, and pins had been invented for the adornment of the females of the species.

Rome came, and left its silver coins in the floor débris of the cave, and its centrally heated villas at nearby Bath. Rome fell, and the Saxons sacked Bath, while the people of Wookey lay low in their subterranean chambers—the supply of fresh water was endless—and the invaders beheld only an empty countryside. But by King Ina's time, when the church at Wells was founded, the cave was inhabited largely by legend.

As we entered the cave, four or five other people appeared from nowhere and assembled round the young man who was to act as our guide. His professional spiel was not the dull drone of the usual verger nor the garbled facts of

the proverbial care-taker. He loved and cherished each separate stalagmite. He spoke of the cave as though it was his child, or as though he had been present from the earliest time of its discovery as a modern wonder. He had perhaps seen twenty-one summers.

His mastery of his stage effects of movable searchlights was colossal. Never until we were all grouped expectantly in the dripping darkness at the entrance to the next chamber, our uncertain feet planted with desperate firmness on the sloping rock, would he snap the switch so that the floodlight lay ahead of us—always on the ceiling first—and then he would move it slowly downward along the ghostly, glistening walls to the quiet pools of water and the still shapes in stone. And he always turned it out behind us as we moved away. Until 1927 visitors carried their own candles and felt their way down slippery steps and round corners damp with cave-sweat.

Caves are not altogether new to me, but Wookey gave me a very queer feeling. There are quite impressive caves in Bermuda, for instance, with musical stalactites, stone images, and all the tricks. But Wookey has been inhabited. In its floor débris are not only human bones—cracked like the others for the extraction of marrow, and suggestive of cannibal feasts—but in the shards of decorated pottery and in the weaving-combs and spindlewhorls and the trinkets of women, are all the small and intimate details of lives lived in the dawn of the world before Rome was an Empire. They have left behind them in the air of Wookey something very sobering.

We were a silent little company that day, as we followed the young guide from chamber to chamber, and admired his lighting effects. And when we came finally to the third

chamber, where the roof is round and low and smoothly vaulted, water-worn the whole way round, the river lay motionless and glassy-clear at our very feet. It was as we stood there that the guide's gentle narrative touched on the prehistoric tribes who refuged underground from continental invasion, so that the disappointed enemy found only an empty, apparently uninhabited countryside to ravage. One of the quiet, tweedy men in the party—he might have kept a country pub somewhere—spoke up. "Not bad during an air raid nowadays," he remarked, and the guide agreed, without surprise, that it would be a very good place indeed. Thus we come full circle. For a couple of days later I read in an evening newspaper that similar caves just over the Welsh border were being provisioned and wired as air-raid shelters.

We emerged blinking into the grey twilight at last and as we retraced our steps along the path the thought of that upstairs lounge in the Swan at Wells, its windows looking on the cathedral green, its little coal fire on the hearth, and its generous teas, bulked larger and larger in our thoughts. We arrived rather breathless at the parking-space, shouted "WELLS!" at the dim, nondescript, forever unillumined face of the driver, and fell into the back seat with sighs of satisfaction.

Wells lived up to it. It was all there—the thrilling, changeless outline of the grey cathedral, the placid stretch of green lawn, the sign of the Swan above the narrow street—the smiling, white-aproned maid, the laden silver tea-tray, the hot toast, the cakes, the scalding, heavenly tea, at a table in the window. Wells never lets you down.

A grey, sunless twilight was drawing in when we had finished tea, and the village of Priddy, the loneliest spot on

Mendip, lay behind us and to the north, on top of the Hills. It would have to be left for another day.

When you come to Bath, as we did in the damp dusk, you come to an embarrassment of riches. If you've read a tenth as much about Bath as I have during the past dozen years, there are parts of its story that you've grown deadly tired of—such as Bladud the king's son and his swine and his leprosy, cured at the bubbling hot springs; such as Beau Nash and his finicking Rules—"No gentleman shall give his ticket for the balls to any but gentlemen. N.B. Unless he has none of his acquaintance;" such as the procession of angels going up and down (headfirst to indicate down) the ladder on the façade of the Abbey. . . .

The idea of a Roman Britain, though, is always an enthralling one. It seems such a contradiction in terms, and was for three hundred years a thriving reality. Caesar failed. But after a hundred years of peaceful penetration by Roman traders, the Legions came again under Claudius and this time succeeded in establishing themselves in the island. By 81 A.D. Agricola had set up a peaceful and orderly administration, and young Britons wore the toga and conversed in Latin. The homesick Roman administrators and wealthy merchants built luxurious Roman villas and tried to recreate in the cool grey climate of Britain something of the soft and colourful life they were accustomed to in Italy. But when Rome began to totter and the Legions were withdrawn one by one, the hardy islanders reverted under Saxon invasion to the old barbarian ways, and central heating disappeared from Britain for another fifteen hundred years.

We hear so much about 18th century Bath, everybody forgets that Pepys was there with his wife in 1668, and bathed in the Cross Bath:

"And by and by, though we designed to have done before company come, much company come; very fine ladies; and the manner pretty enough, only methinks it cannot be clean to go so many bodies together in the same water. Good conversation among them that are acquainted here, and stay together. Strange to see how hot the water is; and in some places, though this is the most temperate bath, the springs so hot as the feet not able to endure. But strange to see, when women and men herein, that live all the season in these waters, that cannot but be parboiled, and look at the creatures of the bath! Carried away, wrapped in a sheet, and in a chair, home; and there one after another thus carried, I staying above two hours in the water, home to bed, sweating for an hour; and by and by, comes musick to play to me, extraordinary good as ever I heard at London almost, or anywhere: 5*s*."

It was at the Bear Inn at Devizes, on the way to Bath, in 1780, that Fanny Burney and Mrs. Thrale became interested in some music, piano and singing, which came from the next room. Mrs. Thrale, Fanny records in her diary, determined to know where it came from, and tapped on the door. In the next room were two lovely girls, thirteen and sixteen, who invited them in, and gave them chairs, and received with becoming modesty their compliments on the music:

"We found they were both daughters of our hostess [at the inn] and born and bred at Devizes. We were extremely pleased with them, and made them a long visit, which I wished to have been longer. But though those pretty girls struck us so much, the wonder of the family was yet to be

produced. This was their brother, a most lovely boy of ten years of age, who seems to be not only the wonder of their family, but of the times, for his astonishing skill in drawing. They protest he has never had any instruction, yet showed us some of his productions that were really beautiful. Those that were copies were delightful—those of his own composition amazing, though far inferior. I was equally struck with the boy and his works.

"We found that he had been taken to town, and that all the painters had been very kind to him, and Sir Joshua Reynolds had pronounced him, the mother said, the most promising genius he had ever met with. Mr. Hoare has been so charmed with this sweet boy's drawings that he intends sending him to Italy with his own son.

"This house was full of books, as well as paintings, drawings, and music; and all the family seem not only ingenious and industrious, but amiable; added to which, they are strikingly handsome."

Before he was twelve the boy had a studio in Alfred Street, Bath, and got a guinea and a half for painting portraits of Mrs. Siddons, Admiral Barrington, and the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire. When he was about seventeen he went to London, and before he came of age he had painted the Queen and Princess Amelia, and obtained the patronage of George III. At twenty-five he was elected to the Royal Academy, and on Benjamin West's death in 1820 he became its President. He was knighted by the Prince Regent, he received fifteen hundred guineas for a single portrait (Lady Gower and child), he was beloved by all the ladies and caused several flutters in high places, and he died unmarried in 1830. His name was Thomas Lawrence.

A list of the people who have breathed Bath air in the last two centuries is practically Who's Who and Burke's Peerage—Gibbon, Herschel, Gainsborough, Dr. Johnson, Livingston, Pitt, Jane Austen, Sheridan, Chesterfield, Wolfe, Scott, Dickens. . . . One could go on forever. The addresses in themselves are unquenchably elegant, the very names of the streets are fragrant with that elusive thing known as *period*—Westgate Street, New King Street, Lansdowne Crescent, Sydney Place, Terrace Walk, South Parade, Saw Close, Trim Street, Gay Street. . . .

6. *The Shadow Lengthens*

I WONDER if I have succeeded in making you forget Godesberg, so that now you are saying, "Let me see, where were we?" That is as it should be. That is the way we felt as we mounted the steps of the Empire Hotel in Bath, about 6 P.M. on September 23rd.

It had been a completely fourth dimensional day, lived between worlds in a delicious false security, outside time and space; a day soaked in an old serenity, deliberately fostered. We had stolen that day from Hitler. We had been happy. Let's see, where were we?

We found out soon enough.

The London evening papers had not yet arrived in Bath, but the BBC was just finishing its six o'clock broadcast. The porter, a handsome, fair-haired lad, had the news. Hitler and Chamberlain had not met all day, he told us a bit grimly. Letters had been exchanged, but Chamberlain had not left his hotel, and Hitler remained "in conference" in his own burrow across the river. Some sort of deadlock had occurred.

Our beautiful day was definitely over. In silence we hurried towards the empty writing-room where the radio's voice could still be heard. There was nothing left now but the market figures. We returned to the lounge and sank rather limply on to one of its cushioned seats behind one of its low tables, and ordered up a couple of old brown sherries.

Then we looked at each other. "We can catch the 7:57 train to London," I said, and she nodded. We both wanted to get back.

We sat there in the spacious lounge, with a coal fire burning on the hearth, waiting for the sherries in a numb sort of way, and saying very little.

Perhaps it is the Empire at Bath that is my favourite hotel, after all. At least, it always is while I am in it. I looked about it that evening feeling both desolate and greedy. Memory wrapped it close round my heart, with recollections of other evenings in that lounge when its air of slightly stodgy serenity had rung entirely true—and I was jealous and tenacious of every past carefree hour within its sheltering walls. The gleaming white paint on its Regency columns—its look of permanence and roominess, the effortless, smiling service of friendly, unhurried people—it had always seemed to me a minor heaven, and now . . .

For years I had nurtured a slight joke about Bath: I was going to retire there, when the time came, and be an old lady in a Bath chair; I was going to live at the Empire, and drink the waters at the Pump Room across the way, and listen to the band concerts in the Institution Gardens. . . .

I fell to wondering that night if the joke was over.

While we were still sitting over our sherries—the London papers had come now, too—a stout old lady rather like Victoria's later portraits, sat down near us and ordered a gin-and-tonic and drank it up in no time. We looked at her with a respect tinged with envy. Maybe she was so old she didn't care; so old she had nothing to lose. She fitted into the Empire picture better than we did. Its residents dress for dinner, thereby making its tourists feel like tramps. That is to say, the male residents put on dinner jackets, and their

female belongings wear things with droopy sleeves and skirts that seem to trail, and usually have scarves round their shoulders against possible draughts.

The inhabitants of the better Bath hotels must be a special breed, a sub-species even, of the Retired, the Widowed, and the Invalided which inhabit English spas. They seem slightly higher-nosed than anywhere else. Most of them look Military, and few of those appear to be below the rank of Colonel. They are likely to have mustaches and Anglo-Indian complexions, and their wives as often as not wear a narrow black velvet ribbon tied round their throats. Nobody is as young as they used to be, though most of them are keeping up very well indeed.—It is an atmosphere which for some doubtless atavistic reason attracts and fascinates me.

We left the old lady looking as though she contemplated another quick one, and went in to an early dinner on account of the London train. The dining-room was vast and empty. The menu—table d'hôte, 7/6—was stupendous. No one over twenty could possibly eat his way straight through it.

While we were still at the soup, a fussy old gentleman in a dinner jacket and a Kitchener mustache came and had a long discussion with the head waiter over a wine-list in the doorway. We caught the word "champagne" and exchanged an incredulous glance. They reached some sort of understanding, and he went away. Train or no train, we felt we had to see who was going to drink champagne that night.

Under the head waiter's direction, two single tables side by side were moved together, in a small bustle of preparation. On one of them sat a bottle of cloudy pink medicine and a bottle of whiskey. We speculated on whether the whis-

key or the medicine went down first each night. An ounce of prevention, we said rather foolishly. (It was pretty awful how little it took to amuse us, what broken straws we caught at, in those days of strain, to anchor our wits to sanity and keep our small flags of courage flying.)

As our roast chicken arrived, the Kitchener mustache returned with his guest, and they went to the tables we had seen prepared, the ones with the bottles. It was not a lady he had ordered champagne for. It was a ruddy-faced, *pukka* sahib in brown tweeds with a sweater showing at his wrists; no dinner jacket, which was really most unusual. The waiter presented a bottle with a flourish, and its label was inspected and approved. Another waiter presented a menu with another flourish—the cards are the size of a twice-folded newspaper—and the man in evening dress regarded it with testy aversion. "Chicken!" we heard him complain. "I get sick of chicken. Why, when I was in the hospital-ship—" His voice dropped away—a waiter passed between—we caught no more.

When we left the dining-room they were touching glasses solemnly. Gallipoli? Or Balaclava?

The three hours up to town in the train were long and cold and dreary. As far as I remember we had the carriage to ourselves. I think we just sat there, hardly speaking.

Percy was at Paddington to meet us, with Pam, aged fifteen, and Honey, the golden retriever, beside him. His smile was a little one-sided as we came down the platform towards him. "I suppose you've heard," he said at once, without any excitement. "He's coming back from Godesberg tomorrow morning."

We said we had heard.

In the car I suggested that my refrigerator was full of

beer and cheese and that I didn't feel very sleepy. They came up to the flat with me, and we set out all the food we could find. There was a glass of grape-juice for Pam and a bowl of water for Honey, while the rest of us tucked into the beer. We turned on the electric fire and the radio. The late news said that Mr. Chamberlain had gone to Herr Hitler's hotel at 10:20 P.M., presumably just to say good-bye, and that he was still there. Our eyes met, and then slid away. But it was hard not to hope.

For a long time we sat there, drinking beer and talking in an exceedingly normal way about the day Dorothy and I had had. Percy had never been to Wookey. He heard all about it. But his eyes were a little heavy as he listened and made intelligent comment, and Dorothy's face, so gay all day with her turned-up smile under a small hat, was now white and drawn. Pam sat on the floor in front of the fire and drank her grape-juice and ate digestive biscuits, with Honey sprawled beside her on the hearthrug. What was going on behind the terrible innocence and composure of her face? Soon she was to be turned over to whatever arrangements her school thought best to make for the protection of its pupils. Was she frightened? Did she think ahead, if not for herself perhaps for Percy, whom she adores? He would be driving a car somewhere, doing what he could, if things got bad. All private cars and drivers would be needed. Next to Honey, Pam seemed the least concerned of any of us. Once she leaned over and laid her cheek against Honey's shoulder, and her shining red hair was almost the colour of the dog's lovely coat. What about Pam, in the days to come? When would she begin to be—or to look—frightened? Watching her on my hearthrug, so silent, so dreadfully self-contained, apparently so absorbed in her love for

that superlative dog, I felt a little sick. How would she look if something suddenly exploded somewhere nearby? What would we three do about Pam if—? Stop it. It won't do. Think of something else. Honey's putting on weight, they'll have to do something about it. Born a hunting-dog, Honey was a coward about guns, and would even try to go under Percy's chair if there was a thunderstorm. Honey would hate an air-raid. . . . That wasn't very funny.

Some time after midnight they went home, and the flat felt very empty as I drew a hot bath and went to bed.

The sound of the morning paper coming through the letter-slot always woke me these days. Things looked pretty bad now. Although at 2 A.M. when Mr. Chamberlain returned to his hotel he had said, "You cannot call this a complete breakdown," the Czechs had been advised to mobilize. Hitler had raised his price again. Poland and Hungary were yelling for their share. The evening papers made first mention of October 1st as the deadline named at Godesberg.

One week. France had mobilized 900,000 men.

Sunday morning after a grim session with the Press, I went for a walk in the Gardens. Daladier and Bonnet had flown to London again. There was shooting on the Czechoslovakian borders, and Prague was cut off by telephone. Garvin, in the *Observer*, was in a fighting mood, but apparently without much hope for anything else. There was a general effort to refrain from jumping to conclusions before more was known about that grisly day at Godesberg. The New York *Times* showed remarkable insight: "When all the facts are known perhaps it will be clear that France and Britain, in facing terrible alternatives, had less margin of choice than the world believes. It is surrender to evil by the democratic

Powers to save themselves from what they consider the greater evil. Yet the American people, having refused to assume any obligation to strengthen the structure we helped build, a structure of which the keystone and symbol was Czechoslovakia, the state born in Pittsburgh and sponsored by our Government, have no right to urge upon others the terrible risks and responsibilities we do not share."

"A GAS-MASK DRIVE" was announced in big headlines, I perceive by the papers now on the desk before me. But that had not yet registered on my consciousness when I went out into the Gardens that morning. I met Percy and Honey at the statue of Physical Energy, and we went on across the grass towards the Serpentine, in order that Honey might retrieve sticks. It had been raining, yellow leaves were down, everything was damp and shining and autumnal. I remember that he said in sudden concern, "Will this spoil your shoes?" and I thought, "Fantastic!" behind my preoccupied, "No, not much."

In our talk we hung on little things, draining each small safe normal topic dry of solace. Rehearsals of his new play—would it ever open? we did not go into that—adorable Honey's tendency to thieve food—the progress, under difficulties we avoided mentioning, of my new book—odds and ends about the trip Dorothy and I had made together. . . .

We came to the Serpentine down near the bridge, and found everything so tidy thereabouts that no throwing-stick was available for Honey. A lovely one floated on the water, four or five dog-lengths out. We tried to get her to bring it in, in order that it could be thrown again, but that didn't appeal to her, for it was someone else's stick. The Park was practically deserted. We stood on the edge of the Serpentine, arguing with Honey in anguished tones like a pair

of fools, because everything mattered now in inverse ratio to its comparative importance. Finally she went into the water and swam about dismally, ignoring the stick, which had not been thrown for her. Unwisely Percy tossed in a small stone in an attempt to direct her attention to the floating stick—we thought she would drown before she gave up her determination to bring back whatever he had thrown and nothing else. In the end she came out with the orphan stick in her mouth, but she knew it was all wrong.

Our spirits rose childishly. We told silly stories, and found them immoderately funny. I was shown the exact spot in a little glade where he and Pam had more than once seen an albino blackbird. We strolled on, heedless of direction, in the wet grass. Honey, who is lazy, began to lag, and was jeered at. We felt tireless, we wanted never to leave the Park, we damned lunch time—we were drunk with nerves.

Punctually at one o'clock we emerged into Bayswater Road and separated for our respective lunches. The spree was over.

I went home and worked awhile. The words which came out of my typewriter looked strange to me as they landed on the page. None of this was happening. I was going to wake up soon. . . .

I went to the telephone and rang up the young Englishman with whom I had sat in the Park the day after Prince Arthur died.

"Come to tea," I suggested lonesomely. "I've given up work for today."

"I should think so," he said, and came.

We took another walk after tea. London seemed very still. It was my favourite walk, down towards the sunken garden by Kensington Palace, and my companion remarked

that the autumn leaves were being raked up early this year. My more far-sighted eyes saw at once that what looked to him like a pile of yellow leaves was actually freshly dug clay deserted by the workmen—and a cold finger touched my spine. Trenches? In London? Already? No, drains. The drains were up, of course. Drains in the Park? And on Sunday?

A second shock a few moments later was not lost on either of us, when a small car turned in from Bayswater Road and pelted down the Broad Walk itself towards Kensington Road at the other end. Pasted to its windshield was a white paper with ARP in hastily pencilled letters. Air Raid Precautions. Normally the passage of anything larger than a pram down the Broad Walk would be as incredible a sight as a monoplane taxiing along Rotten Row bridle-path.

On Monday the unspectacular black and white ARP posters had gone up over night in the windows of banks and post offices and public buildings, and were pasted on stone walls and gate-posts. Announcements of a similar nature had been thrown on the screens at the cinemas Sunday evening—rather startling—and had come through loud-speakers at sports gatherings, and were read out from the pulpits: where to go to get your gas-masks, information about gas-proofing rooms, etc.

You in America to whom the drone of an engine overhead merely means the night mail-plane—how do you think it feels to walk in familiar streets, buy the usual food for dinner, send off the laundry, ride in crowded buses, take the family to the cinema, brush your teeth, go to bed (and to sleep) and wake to a new day—to *live* in a city not yet under fire, to be sure, but accessible to bombing from the

air, and suddenly liable to it within a week's time? Remember that in 1938 Warsaw, Helsinki, Oslo, Rotterdam, Louvain and Dunkirk were still whole. In 1938 one had imagined Barcelona and Madrid—aided by the newsreels. One had dwelt on the tragic plight of Europeans in China. But bring it home. Make it you, in the town which looks entirely normal to you and to the people of your own blood, where your children set out fearlessly each day to school; no outposts of empire, no foreign language between you and the tradesmen, no crusading zeal, no Red Cross uniforms, no volunteer adventuring—just your own home as it stands there, naked to the sky. How does it feel?

Suppose you were any one of a dozen Englishwomen I talked to in 1938. You'd have a husband of military age, perhaps, a house full of books and chintz and open fireplaces, a garden which you tended yourself with the help of an odd-man two or three days a week; and you'd drive a small car into the village to shop where the butcher and the chemist and the young woman in the bakery all knew your likes and dislikes and your name, and inquired after your delphiniums in the dry weather. Or perhaps you'd run a typewriter somewhere in the City, and a young man in a solicitor's office or a bank would take you to dinner at the Corner House, and you'd go early to the cinema in order to get a shilling seat not too far to the side; and your brother would be saving up to own his garage and marry the girl who'd stuck to him for three years without complaining. Or perhaps you'd live in a little flat in Bayswater or South Kensington, with week-ends and holidays at your son's place in Surrey, where two babies played on the lawn, the grandchildren your own husband, dead in 1917 at Passchendaele, never saw.—In that sudden twilight of September, 1938,

how high would have been your high principles about Mittel Europa? I'm only asking.

To the average, unexcitable, moderately well-informed English family, Czechoslovakia had been until the summer of 1938 a still somewhat academic question—an abstract example of the democratic principle, whose national future did not bear directly on their own personal established way of living. Czechoslovakia was linked to France by treaty obligations. England was, in a pinch, bound to back up France. But it was for France to decide. And France didn't want war. In the opinion of the average Englishman at that time, to declare war on Czechoslovakia's behalf was to launch a crusade, and the crusading spirit is not a thing you can whip up all at once in the middle of your summer holiday. Oh, yes, there had been Austria—but Austria was Germanic, and had been Germany's ally. And, yes, before that there had been the Saar and the Rhineland—full, after all, of Germans, like the Sudetenland. Of course once there had been Belgium, and then it had been necessary to go in and stop them—but that sort of thing wouldn't happen *now*. Not *today*, with the sun shining, and people coming to tea! Dear God, not *again!*

By Monday noon in the Green Park underneath the windows of the Ritz there were trenches. In the small private squares and back gardens of Mayfair, Bayswater, Kensington, Chelsea—trenches. Men had been digging all night by the light of motor lorry headlamps, flares, and improvised searchlights. The outdoor restaurant in Hyde Park with its white table-cloths and gay umbrellas had been put away, and gangs of dirty, clay-stained workmen were being given lunch from the cafeteria side. There was very little talk and no laughter among them as they gulped down the brief meal.

They were being paid a very welcome two bob an hour, but they didn't like their job.

An amateur football game going on in Hyde Park had a gallery about equal in numbers to that of a trench-digging unit a stone's throw away. "Football first, air raids second," remarked the man who drove the car in which I sat.

Sand-bags were going up round Burlington House in the heart of Piccadilly, round the museums and public buildings, St. Paul's and the City churches, in Downing Street and in Whitehall. Traffic was complicated by trucks loaded with anti-aircraft guns and searchlights and Air Territorials.

A typed letter was put through the letter-slot of every door in the big block of flats where I lived. It read as follows:

Dear Sir/Madam,

AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS

Many of our tenants have expressed a desire to assist in the arrangements which are being carried out to make certain parts of the building gas proof and splinter proof and have offered to make contributions towards the cost. The Company are grateful for these suggestions and a contribution of £1.1.0 from each flat would, we think, defray the cost.

A full statement will be available to show how the money has been spent.

While writing it is thought advisable to inform tenants that in the regrettable event of Hostilities, certain services may be interrupted or curtailed, especially gas, electricity, water, and lifts.

Yours faithfully, etc.

That night spade work went on in the small hours by searchlight, under my windows which faced the back.

Nearly all the schools with resident pupils, those fine, expensive, well-established schools along the healthful south coast of England, had already made arrangements for new headquarters deep in the west country and were ready to move out bodily. Day pupils were requested to come prepared with twenty-four hours' food, warm clothing, and gas-masks.

The Council schools, corresponding to our city grammar and high schools, issued to each child a ticket which entitled him to a place in the school's evacuation train. If the dreaded "state of emergency" was declared, the children would be spirited away to safety in Wales or Scotland, in charge of their teachers. Twenty-four hours would probably elapse before their parents would know exactly where they had been taken. Yet most parents acquiesced in this arrangement—it was not compulsory—and felt that the children would be safer with their school units than in their homes in London. The child's outfit required to be assembled and kept ready at the school had rather the sound of a soldier's kit: warm clothing, a day's food, a change of shoes, a mackintosh, a blanket, and a gas-mask. After the first day, they were to be billeted and fed at the Government's expense.

Nervous children were sick and tearful with apprehension over these arrangements. My char had a delicate little girl who had never been away from home overnight. Facing the possible separation, the child cried all the time, could not eat, begged not to go to school each day, and finally made herself genuinely ill and was allowed to stay at home in bed. Mrs. Richmond is a fine, upstanding woman with sensible ways, and she's not talkative. "My husband's only got one good hand from the last war—so *he* can't go," she remarked that morning over my breakfast-tray. And after a moment, ellip-

tically—"It's the children this time, isn't it, mum." And she went away into the kitchen without giving me a chance to fumble out an answer.

Until you have stitched a little canvas bag for your child to carry a gas-mask in—according to regulations, it had a long loop to go over the head and was less than a foot square, and hung like a sporran below the belt when at "the ready" —you have not faced up to modern warfare as England faced up to it suddenly in 1938.

There was still very little scaremongering, even among the cheaper newspapers, and absolutely no panic in any class of people. It struck me that sensationalism in the Press was all in the direction of "Peace" headlines which unhappily could not be lived up to in the columns below and which were almost entirely repudiated in the leaders. Apparently the papers which held out the most hope sold the most copies.

Of course a great many people still refused to contemplate the idea of being personally blown to bits in London if war came—and at the same time they were making quiet arrangements for their women and old people to go to relatives in the country or into lodgings in the west of England. Some of them took leases on country houses for which the rent had to be paid six months in advance. Until you have watched powerless while your dearest friends do anxious sums stretching limited capital and uncertain income over an indefinite period of living expenses outside London, while the London rent must still be paid, you have been spared one of the finer points of impending modern war. And at the same time that they assured themselves that the family would surely be safe at such-and-such a place, and that 50 miles outside London would surely be enough, the men who meant to stay behind

in Town were well aware that there would be no rules to this war, no boundaries, no precedents—except perhaps those in Spain, which it was best not to think of.

"I hate to leave him here alone," a woman friend said to me through stiff lips. "But one of us has got to keep safe, I suppose, on account of the children."

Once again, on Monday, the 26th, we were waiting for a speech by Hitler. At 8 P.M. at the Sports Palace in Berlin, he would reply to the Czech refusal of the Godesberg terms, and presumably expound his Saturday ultimatum. As usual, while we waited, I found myself in Kensington Gardens, unable to sit still at a typewriter trying to re-create a world in which there was no immediate threat of war, for a book which might be hopelessly dated before it was ever published.

I drifted along alone, with a look in at the delicious sunken garden, where pigeons strutted beside the pool and the massed colours of the flowers made a pattern of serenity. You could not see the trenches from there. Again the nightmare of illusion engulfed me. The garden was as it had always been and always would be. Surely nothing would touch the garden, nothing even to give the pigeons a fright. This was London, where violence simply did not happen. . . .

Throughout all those September days there was for me somehow no personal quality in the anxiety. My American citizenship did not operate on my sense of complete identity with the potential victims of this catastrophe, which, if it came, promised to be cosmic and not local. I had no impulse towards any individual dodge for escape. There would be no bolt-holes from the end of the world.

Standing there in the pleached walk, with my elbows on the iron gate gazing down into the little sanctuary of the

soul which is a garden, I found it hard to reconcile my feeling of incredulous security with the perfunctory gestures towards personal safety which I had made that morning. I had accepted an invitation to stay with friends in Buckinghamshire if it "became advisable to leave London." (The euphemisms we invented in those days to avoid saying the word *war!*) If war came, I was going down into the country because London would be bombed from the air. That was what it amounted to. I contemplated it cold-bloodedly, there in the pleached walk. I had packed a bag with warm country clothing, I had laid out a few indispensable books to go with me. Mustn't forget to take the typewriter, and plenty of needlework. Must remember to stop the milk and the papers. Must give Mrs. Richmond a little extra money. . . . Fantastic. But people were leaving the Sudeten area with bundles. Yes, but this was *London*. . . .

I drifted on, across the Broad Walk and past the Round Pond where there wasn't much activity, and came round towards the Flower Walk from the eastern end. As I got near the Albert Memorial a high-pitched sound could be heard in Kensington Road beyond. My steps slowed a little just under the Cedar of Lebanon, as I listened. Another Special Edition? Good news or bad? My ear attuned itself suddenly. It was not a newsboy crying headlines; it was just a big dog barking!

Condemning my own nerves, I became aware of a man at a standstill just in front of me—a stooping, elderly man in immaculate tweeds and light gloves, with a walking-stick. As I came level with him, he too perceived that what he had stopped to listen to was only a dog, and he turned back towards me to continue his way eastwards. As he did so, our eyes met squarely, and we passed each other with a small

smile of rueful understanding and mutual chagrin. That momentary glance between us was as intimate as though we had known each other for years—if we had known each other less well, we would have spoken. After contemplating this phenomenon for a few more steps I turned sharply to look after him, at the same moment that he looked over his shoulder after me. There was no one in the twenty yards between us. Smiling broadly, I flung up one hand in a gesture of hail and farewell, and saw the surprised jerk of his own hand to his hat-brim as I swung away down the Flower Walk.

Since I started to write this book, it has occurred to me to wonder—and to other people to inquire—why I didn't talk to more people at that time. I know why I didn't, of course. I am not by nature a reporter, and I am not a visitor from overseas while I am in England. I live as nearly as possible like an Englishwoman, with English servants and tradespeople and English friends. I am not insulated from London by the largely foreign staffs of the big hotels. On September 26th it was my Crisis just as much as it was theirs. And I was too busy getting through each day as it came along to record my own reactions or other people's, except subconsciously. Since then I have gone almost crazy with the effort to remember things.

Throughout the Crisis the normal procedure of the BBC news broadcast never varied. We had to listen first to the Weather Forecast, which we had ceased to care about, the SOS messages, and the Navigational Warnings—in code, at dictation speed—before we got to the international situation. This was followed by lesser news items of a domestic nature, and then the stock exchange and the football scores. There is never any comment on the news from the BBC. Only the facts. The American networks could learn from this.

But at the end of September the BBC microphone was more than once charged with an emotion too strong for its traditional reserve. On Monday night, after Hitler's ranting, screaming defiance of the whole world at the Berlin Sports Palace, the BBC news announcer was noticeably shaken by the words he had to read. Hitler had boasted of Austria, with a sinister reference to Schuschnigg in a violent personal attack on Benes. He wanted nothing from England. He wanted nothing from France—except peace. (Remember the man who wanted nothing but civility, and damned little of that?) He spoke of his "alliance of hearts" with Italy. He said that Czechoslovakia was the last territorial claim he would make in Europe. But—his patience was now at an end. He was the soldier of his people. Ready, *march!*

So now we knew.

Ambassador Kennedy had issued a statement advising Americans to leave England as soon as possible. President Roosevelt's cable to Hitler had not been given to the German newspapers, the German people were unaware of its existence, and Hitler had made no reply to it. Certain Tube stations were being closed in London, "for urgent structural alterations"—which meant bomb-proofing. The French Commander-in-Chief had flown to London. Parliament was called for Wednesday. . . .

Driven by a need to do *something*, I packed away all my more frivolous clothes in the trunk and locked it. Still feeling the need of action, I put a transatlantic call through to New York, and eventually heard my husband's voice on the wire. Jumping to conclusions as is his wont, he got the idea that I had panicked and wanted to sail for home, and he undertook to reassure me. I was furious. I shouted at him. The three minutes were up.

There is a lovely girl I know who two years ago married a man she adores, after a difficult and complicated period of waiting. They bought a delightful house in Sussex. In the next winter the child they both wanted so much was born. On Tuesday morning she talked to me on the phone from Sussex. The house was full of refugee relatives, and her voice was hard with strain. "Get out of here, what are you waiting for?" she said. "If this war comes, it's going to be hell's delight. Fred says it's got to come. Why don't you get out of here while you can?" They weren't excitable people. Her husband, who was in the Great War, is a very sound man in the City. They had contrived happiness, founded a gracious home, brought a child of love into what kind of world? Hell's delight, she said.

I hung up the telephone wanting to cry over her, and went out to my bank. I would want money for a sojourn in the country, and perhaps a little extra might come in handy somewhere. . . . The manager—who was a Special Constable in Piccadilly, you remember—looked at me thoughtfully now and asked about my sailing date. I said I had a Cunard passage on the 15th of October. I had been saying this in answer to repeated inquiries for several days, wherever I went. It was a Liverpool-Glasgow sailing and it suited me, but nobody else was satisfied with it any more. I said I had arranged to go down into the country if necessary. I said that with the rush on I didn't suppose it was a bit of use trying to advance the date anyway. I said I hadn't even tried.

At the bank they pointed out one thing which hadn't yet occurred to me. If hostilities really started on Saturday, my October 15th sailing wouldn't be worth tuppence. There was no telling what boats might be taken for troop-transport, and what would become of the passenger service, if things got

really nasty. Of course there were American boats, but they were packed out for weeks to come. I said philosophically, in the strange inertia which I called sanity, that I would have to chance it for the 15th. They said I was crazy, and did I want to get home in time for Christmas? That took me a little by surprise.

Soon there was a well-organized drive on to move me. People had influence at the steamship office. People at the steamship office were charming and concerned themselves about me. I was told to go home and pack for sailing. I said I was packed, thank you, and went away, having once more lost my grip on realities.

Packed for the country. Yes, of course. But even my prospective hosts in Buckinghamshire advised me cordially to take anything I could get in the way of a steamship booking. It began to dawn on me that perhaps they would be just as well off without me—without anything extra to think about—in the days to come. With genuine hurt feelings I realized that I was, after all, an alien, and I found it wholly bewildering and sad. I didn't really belong there. But I felt as though I did. I thought of Tomlinson of Berkeley Square shivering in the Wind that blows between the Worlds, and said so. "Nonsense," they replied. "Wait till you see the New York skyline."

Meanwhile the Buckinghamshire plans went forward. During the afternoon two of us drove down to the cottage with masses of luggage and necessities, in order to leave the car free on the next trip for passengers only, in the event of a quick move. Petrol restrictions were coming in. The London garage man said that he was only allowed a full tin for an empty one, and therefore to keep his stock up he was unable to sell extra tins. Soon they would be allowed to sell only

two gallons at a time in any circumstances. We were advised to keep our tank always full up as we went.

"It looks as though we are going to have to go out and do something about things," said the man behind the wheel, and the garage man grinned, showing the notoriously bad teeth of the cockney.

"I wouldn't mind 'aving a crack at 'im myself," he said, and waved us on cheerily.

It was a thoughtful drive, along Western Avenue and into the leafy villages which begin less than an hour from Town. I had done it so many times in the old, lighthearted days when I lived in a cottage near the one where I was to refuge now. And while I lived there, we had made in this very car long daily loops out through Oxfordshire into Warwickshire, Worcestershire, and Gloucestershire. I was writing a book set in the Cotswold country then. . . .

At the foot of the private lane leading to the cottage there is an attractive red brick house with a high wooden gate. A large white paper was tacked to the gate, with very amateur printing in crayon capitals:

AIR WARDEN
GET
GAS-MASKS
HERE

As we intended to be in residence at the cottage in an emergency, we thought it might be best for the two of us, at least, to get our masks from the local Warden rather than in London, and after unloading the car at the cottage we drove back down the lane to his gate, which stood unlatched. A woolly brown dog met us in the drive in a high state of

nerves, and before we could ring the house door was opened by a plump, fair English housewife, who smiled brightly and said, "In there, please."

We entered a small, plain sitting-room with worn chintz furniture, a severe brick mantelpiece, and a painted wooden fire-screen across an empty grate. A bare table just inside the door was covered with printed directions and diagrams for preparing a gas-proof chamber in your own home. In the opposite corner of the room a long mirror had been propped up in an armchair beside a low smoking-table which held three gas-masks and a bowlful of milky liquid. There was a strong smell of disinfectant.

Three other people were ahead of us; a middle-aged woman who stood before the mirror being fitted by the Warden as we came in; an elderly woman, and somebody's housemaid awaiting their turn.

In the country, where the need was considered less urgent, gas-mask fittings were being made and recorded from sample masks, but the actual supply was not on hand for distribution. "It will be a case of our driving round in cars and bunging them down on your doorsteps, I expect," the Warden told us cheerfully. He was a tall, broad-shouldered, responsible-looking man, and he had a sort of grave gallantry with the old lady, who was nervous and trying not to show it.

"Will I have to take this down, or cut it off?" she queried, touching her small, shining bun of grey hair as she stood forward to be fitted.

"No, no, I think we can manage about that," he assured her seriously, in the voice one uses to an uneasy child. "Put your chin well in—then spread the straps—there's no hurry—that's right—now, is that quite comfortable?—breathe deeply, please—"

His wife caught my eyes and gave me a wise smile. In addition to opening the door, she was standing by to swab out the masks with disinfectant after each fitting. She explained to the old lady, who expressed relief that there was disinfectant, that they only swabbed out the masks between *families*, not individuals.

The old lady emerged at last, a little rumpled, and replaced her hat hastily with fingers that were not quite steady. "It wasn't such an ordeal after all," she said bravely, as one released from the dentist's chair, and the Warden's laughter was indulgent. "No, nothing to it at all!" he assured her, and beckoned to the housemaid, who stepped forward tense and unsmiling.

She had a long chin and a queer-shaped head altogether, the mask leaked at the sides, and the Warden's tact and patience were endless. At last he was satisfied, and it was my turn. His formula was the same for each of us, as though we had not heard the others. The buckle caught in my hair and his wife had to help him untangle it, with skillful, unhurried fingers. We laughed together quietly, not like strangers.

The mirror which faced the wearer of the mask was disconcerting. "I think on the whole I look better without it," my host remarked as he came clear of his.

Other people were waiting now, fingering the grim literature about gas-proof chambers. We delayed to register the car and the cottage phone number, for any emergency or local service, arranged to report to the Warden at once if we returned to the cottage to stay, and drove back to Town maskless and a little silent, in the lovely English dusk.

"How do we get at this war?" asked the man beside me suddenly. "It's no good hammering at 'em on their Western

frontier. We'll catch it by air, of course, but that doesn't win wars."

"The Navy will come into it. They did before," I suggested.

"But the only way in by land is through Italy." He paused. "Musso won't like that, will he!"

Even so, it wasn't clear to us then that he had put his finger on the weak spot in Hitler's plans. Italy.

"FOUR DAYS MORE," said an evening newspaper when we got back to London. The Poles had raided the Czech frontier at Teschen, which was now to be delivered by and to Poland from alleged Czech terrorism. "Czechoslovakia sent a note to Poland offering to negotiate on the Polish claim for Teschen, but Poland found it unsatisfactory." Apparently anybody could do it.

500,000 people had left Paris. London school evacuation was to start tomorrow. 6,000 men were wanted for London's barrage balloon corps. Ration cards would be ready within a few days. . . .

The rest of the family were upset that we had not got gas-masks to bring back with us, so we went round to where they had got theirs a few hours before.

It was a large, bare room in a parochial school, about 9 P.M. that evening, and it had begun to rain again. The place smelled of wet mackintoshes, people, and a chilly mustiness—while pervading all was the unfamiliar, acrid, not unpleasant odour which was gas-mask. A sickly inefficient illumination came from a few naked electric bulbs dangling from the ceiling. Down the center of the long room a double row of plain wooden chairs had been set back to back. Every chair was occupied, and there was a queue at the door.

Up and down each row moved half a dozen volunteer

ARP workers, and from the practiced hands of each dangled the small black snout-like apparatus designed to preserve its wearer's life against certain forms of gas; only certain forms, and only about four hours, or until (presumably) a gas-shelter could be reached. Against mustard-gas, for instance, it was useless.

"Get your chin well in—that's right—is that quite comfortable?—please breathe deeply—thank you—a little tighter, I think—once more—thank you. That's yours, madam. Never carry it by the straps, as it might stretch. Keep it dry, and don't let the eye-piece get crumpled. You register just there on the way out, where the next queue has formed. Good-night, madam—"

My vacated chair was filled at once, but he turned back smiling to the one next down the line: "Put your chin well in—that's right—is that quite comfortable?—"

He was young and plain and sandy with a round, kind face and a gentle voice. His brown tweed clothes were not of the best. He is printed on my memory forever in admiration and respect. He had been fitting gas-masks since 8 o'clock that morning, tireless, polite, cheerful, smiling, with nothing to keep him going that he could recall except a couple of beers. Frightened, large-eyed children had sat quiet under his reassuring hands—very few of them cried. (Every child over four years of age could be fitted with a gas-mask. But it was admitted that no dependable apparatus had been devised for children under four.) Old ladies had been shaky and tearful, with anxious eyes brightening to his friendly smile. His contemporaries had honked hollow wise-cracks through the thing while it was in place, and had been answered in kind. He never missed when a respectful "sir" was in order from

him. He was young England in the Crisis. I shall never see him again and I shall never forget him.

At a long bare table under more naked electric bulbs in another bleak room adjoining, a couple of girls sat in their hats and coats with note-books and pencils, taking down the names and addresses and the size of each gas-mask issued—Large, Medium, and Small. After about thirteen hours of it, with very little relief, their handwriting was still neat, they still looked up and smiled at each newcomer in the queue, and said good-night. At the exit, leading into an alley, another girl stood leaning against the doorpost, her job being to remind each person again as he left the building to keep his mask dry. Her voice was gay and sweet, and she had a genuine laugh and a jolly remark for the young man who had nestled his mask inside his felt hat for protection, and so emerged bareheaded into the drizzle. She must have laughed at dozens of masks in dozens of hats like that that day.

Comforted and sustained by the sanity and tact of the volunteer ARP, people who had queued up outside the front door looking old and drawn and anxious, came out the back door smiling and hugging a gas-mask and chatting to strangers. That is morale.

I think on that Tuesday, which now seems so long ago, there was really no hope left in England. We still smiled conscientiously when we spoke, we were a little extra polite and cheery to waitresses and taxi-men and shop assistants, who were a little extra solicitous in our service. Everybody was subconsciously sorry for everybody else, and wanted to be kinder. Nobody knew what greater burden of anxiety the next person carried.

There was that dreadful business of very young children

having no protection. Suppose you had to watch your bewildered five-year-old son stand forward obediently to be fitted with a gas-mask, his grave and trusting gaze seeking your face for reassurance through the celluloid eye-piece, while the young man in charge of him was very sane and charming and gentle about it all. Suppose you had been told, as I had heard Englishwomen being told that evening, that the best thing to do with children under four—it was the only thing—was to wrap them in a blanket, closely, making sure that the fabric covered their faces, and take them as quickly as possible to the nearest gas-shelter. And suppose you had to try to answer the five-year-old boy's quite reasonable questions about what would become of the baby sister in her pram, who had no gas-mask.

Also, there were invalids who couldn't be moved, or who would have to be evacuated from hospitals much too soon in an emergency, for hospitals must be cleared as far as possible, said the ARP, facing facts, for the immediate casualties in an air raid. (The same corps of tireless, tactful ARP volunteers made personal trips to fit and deliver gas-masks in the homes and at the bedsides of all people unable to come to the distributing centres.) And to many lonely solitaries in that animal-loving nation there was the very real anxiety that no way had been devised to protect beloved dogs and cats and birds—from gas.

Much has been written about the fear of gas, alleging it to be a tremendous psychological factor in war; more psychological, it is also alleged, than actual. We remembered—perhaps with an effort—that even in Spain, even in China, the horror of extensive gas warfare had never been resorted to. We reminded ourselves very sanely that its menace was no doubt exaggerated, and dwelt on its impractical aspects as

part of offensive tactics. But the masks were there before us, spectacles must not be worn inside them for fear of leakage, those solemn printed instructions for making inexpensive gas-proof shelters in any home were being issued free of charge. Oh, yes, everything was free. The masks cost the Government 2/6 each. About 60¢.

The usual cockney humour had begun to bloom in the less formal columns of the newspapers, some of it adapted from stories well-known in the Great War, but funny to the new generation.

Two Covent Garden porters, overheard:

"Wotcher mean, war? They can't start a war, I 'aven't even been fitted wiv me b—y gas-mask yet."

"Gawd, Alf, we thought you 'ad it on!"

Two more, in a pub:

"Well, Bert, been fitted wiv yer gas-mask yet?"

"Naow, the wife is knittin' me one."

And so on.

On that Tuesday we were still saying that it wouldn't really happen—knowing as we said it that in 1914 they had said the same thing up till midnight on August 4th. "I cannot believe that the German people will allow their Leader to bring about such a disaster as world war," said Mr. Atlee of the Opposition, futilely. He neglected to say just how he thought the German people could arrange to stay their Leader's hand, overnight. It was very easy too to insist that Hitler was bluffing. Especially if you had not been to Berchtesgaden and Godesberg.

We were saying—rather pitifully, as one looks back—that somebody would surely think of something. We were saying that maybe Roosevelt—maybe Russia—maybe Czechoslo-

vakia—. On Tuesday not many of us thought of saying maybe Mussolini—.

The Tuesday evening papers printed the news of Germany's general mobilization order for 2 P.M. on Wednesday, which cut down the chances for peace by half. Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, all that valuable time for last minute inspiration or action by somebody was swept away. No one could blame Czechoslovakia if the shooting began tomorrow at 2 P.M. instead of Saturday. Then France. Then England. Then—we hoped—Russia. Hell's delight.

On Tuesday evening we listened with poker-faced hopelessness to Prime Minister Chamberlain's broadcast from Downing Street. Starkly simple, with no paraliamentary flourishes, his words dropped quietly into the tense silence of thousands of anxious homes. ". . . For the present I ask you to await as calmly as you can the events of the next few days. So long as war has not taken place, there is always the hope that it may be prevented, and you know that I am going to work for peace to the last moment. Good-night."

When he had finished speaking the impersonal BBC voice said merely, "A translation of Mr. Chamberlain's speech will follow immediately." And immediately in German a full news broadcast, not only of Mr. Chamberlain's speech, but of President Roosevelt's long cable to Hitler (verbatim) and a general news summary was given on the strongest wavelength England has. When that was finished, it was promptly repeated in Italian. This was a last effort to reach the blindfolded people of the dictator states with the dangerous truth which was being kept from them—that they stood on the brink of war, world war. And while we heard next day that an attempt to drown it out was made by putting on records of Hitler's Berlin speech over all the German stations, we

supposed that some of it must have got through—or at least the useful knowledge that something was being deliberately blanketed by the Fuehrer's recorded voice.

Up until a few years ago, you almost never heard an airplane over London except during a week or so of summer manoeuvres. Now the hum of planes was never entirely absent from dawn till after midnight, and on Tuesday night searchlight drill with target planes began. They seemed to fly abnormally low.

On Wednesday morning, with the 2 P.M. German mobilization order hanging over us—it seemed a slight redundancy to speak of mobilization in Germany—London was heavy with a grim calm. You may have heard that London jittered in September, 1938, because I have heard it myself, even from people who were there. Usually when I say that I was there too, hasty reservations are made as to exactly what was meant by jitters. I was all over London, because I couldn't keep out of the streets and shops and restaurants, and I didn't see any jitters. The population of London was thrown out of its stride, bewildered, stunned, or appalled—because for all the warnings and portents we had had in other years, now that it had come, it *seemed* sudden.

The essential national sanity and good temper of Britain was to her own disadvantage in dealing with the European situation as it developed. The British are an unwarlike, unexcitable, non-mob people, with an unaggressive sense of humour. There was a man called Hitler across the way who yelled a lot, and made fearsome faces, and trod on everybody's toes and was a general nuisance—a sort of super-Donald Duck, only not so funny. But the English characteristically went on hoping that if nobody took it up with him he'd get tired and go away. This was culpable negligence, in

the beginning, and ultimately became a besetting sin. But it was the typically English sin of minding their own business in the expectation that other people would mind theirs. It is a nation whose would-be Hitlers have always been allowed to take it out on a soap-box in Hyde Park with a benevolent bobby looking on to make sure the speaker doesn't get hurt.

Newspaper placards on Wednesday morning proclaimed the mobilization of the British Fleet. Trenches and sandbagging went forward doggedly everywhere. On Tuesday we had been hopeless. On Wednesday we were very nearly resigned. There is a distinct difference.

Summoned by telephone, I reported sceptically at the Cunard office and was handed a ticket for September 30th from Liverpool. I had already been given to understand over and over again that unless I took that ticket—*any* ticket, operating before October 1st—I might find myself marooned "for the duration." The passenger waiting-list was already long. If sailings were cancelled it would be chaos. And if I didn't want that ticket for the 30th, a lot of other people did.

I looked round the seething office full of strained, unhappy faces and hurried clerks. I was feeling numb and unreal again, unable to think properly. The steamship man was waiting not very patiently, poor soul, his eyes raking my face. He had a thousand things to see to. I was wasting his time. Perhaps, I thought, I was all wrong about this thing. Perhaps my London had really come to an end. It didn't feel like London any more. Perhaps this was really the twilight of the world, and the place to be was home, which was after all New York. So I gave up my ticket for October 15th, took my new one, paid some more money, and went away. I hope I said the right things to people who had taken trouble about me. I felt no gratitude and no relief, as I stepped out again

into the grey, pregnant streets; only a greater desolation. England was "for it." I wanted to pick England up bodily and run. I stood still in Trafalgar Square in a dreary drizzle with an aching throat and saw things through a blur.

Well, yes, I was overwrought and very short of sleep. One sat up for the late BBC news at 11:50, and the planes made a noise overhead all night. One woke sharply at the sound of the morning paper coming through the letter-slot and rubbed tired eyes to read brave headlines, less reassuring details, and unilluminating leaders. There was no let-up all day. One bought the papers as they came out, waited for the BBC news, stiffened one's upper lip, clutched at straws—sat tight. And the planes interfered with sleep again the next night.

Vaguely I found a cable office near Trafalgar Square. Just outside it a newspaper seller was fastening a new placard to his apron, and a fresh bundle of midday papers was under his arm. "HITLER DENIES 2 P.M. MOBILIZATION ORDER." I bought a paper and as I entered the cable office the middle-aged commissionaire behind the counter glanced towards it keenly. I showed him the headline. "He'll be denyin' everything before long," he said with a bitter smile. There were bright service ribbons on the breast of his tunic.

For days it had been impossible for me to settle to anything or to keep out of the streets and parks for long. I drifted along now, watching people's faces. Four boys from a Highland regiment, looking pitiably young and grave. More Territorial anti-aircraft trucks. Five maimed men singing in the gutter. Old, old taxi-drivers, hunched over their wheels, brooding. Young taxi-drivers, steering easily, with set faces. Boyish bobbies, looking exactly as usual.

Sometimes a young man and a girl, walking blindly with locked hands.

I turned into the National Gallery. It was utterly deserted, except for two uniformed attendants at their posts and a girl behind the postcard counter, absorbed in a newspaper. The doors leading to the rooms at the top of the stairs were closed and curtained. As I went out again, past the stairs leading down to the basements, I heard sounds of activity. Treasures were being moved to safety.

I lunched on sawdust and shavings at a restaurant in Bond Street. It was full of the usual people, eating the usual things, talking quietly—so quietly. The waitress and I exchanged the helpful, understanding smiles of two people who meet at a sickbed.

I took a bus into Oxford Street, and more or less came to again in a large department store. Its aisles and counters were nearly empty. With a dim idea of people at home who always expected some sort of gift on my return, I picked up some embroidered handkerchiefs and stood futilely holding them a few moments and then carried them further along to where a girl was writing in her salesbook. She looked up at me with dazed eyes, and performed a smile. "I'm sorry you had to serve yourself," she said. "Half our girls are out on gas-mask fittings."

Mr. Chamberlain would be facing the crowded House now. We had to kill time till after that. Nothing much before the BBC news broadcast at 6 P.M., perhaps, but then we might hear at last the details of those conversations at Berchtesgaden and Godesberg. We would probably hear too an army mobilization order for Britain.

I went on to my favourite bookshop, and bought quite a lot of books for the voyage. The man who made out the bill said

he was afraid they couldn't send them very soon, as two of their delivery men were in the Territorials. I carried the books away myself, and tripped blindly on the threshold and nearly broke my neck.

The Prime Minister was still speaking. . . .

Suddenly I was chilly and tired and sick and wanted a decent cup of tea. I stepped into a taxi—what would taxis do about petrol?—and went home to the flat where my luggage stood ready to close. I must have left the West End only a short time before that tremendous scene at Westminster when Hitler's invitation to Munich—inspired by Mussolini—was read.

Looking back, especially after months of bitter experience, caustic commentators have found it fatally easy to imply that the arrival of the Munich invitation was a piece of consummate stage-managing—an emotional *crise* contrived by a group of crafty and wrong-headed politicians to pave the way for a diplomatic sell-out. The implication presupposes an amount of acting ability in Lord Halifax, Sir John Simon, Mr. Chamberlain, and a couple of anonymous secretaries and messengers, which is badly wanted in the theatres of the West End.

As a matter of fact, events seem to have moved too swiftly even for timing. And any student of history can cite similarly momentous occasions, even before the invention of the telegraph, when things appeared to happen on prearranged cues, as though for the best possible dramatic effect in the textbooks of generations to come.

I heard nothing till the BBC news at six o'clock. Simultaneously a friend arrived with the evening papers. We stared at each other, afraid to be too glad. I tried to read the papers and hear the BBC at the same time. Then by some hom-

ing instinct we both felt our way to the sideboard and got down a drink apiece. The strong, calm voice of the BBC flowed on. I read the papers again.

"It—doesn't settle anything, of course," I said cautiously. "He's been to Germany before!"

"No, perhaps it's not quite as good as it looks," the Englishman agreed at once. "It's worth a couple of drinks—but that's about all it's worth at the moment."

The burnt child. Twice bitten. Wolf, wolf. But we went out to dinner feeling years younger, and there was a little sober revelry in London that night generally. My first impulse was to unpack. But only a few hours too soon I had given up my October 15th sailing. I couldn't face them again at the office. I had notified the agency I was leaving the flat. The trunk I always leave in storage had gone.

After Wednesday night's slightly heady relief, on Thursday morning we drew in our spiritual belts again, and remembered several things we had temporarily allowed ourselves to forget. "RESPITE," was the morning headline. We dared not call it more. "ARP Must Go On," said the papers.

The scene at Heston airport also was memorable. Chamberlain's overworked, weary, hag-ridden Cabinet turned out of bed at an unearthly hour to see him off to Germany for the third time. Like schoolboys they milled about him under the spreading wings of the great plane, jostling each other to pat him on the back, shake his hand, wish him godspeed. The crowd cheered and waved as the tall, spare figure made its way towards the ladder. Before he entered the plane, he took off his hat and smiled at them in his undramatic way. "I think it will be all right this time," he said. A man would have been more than human—or considerably less—if he

had not tried to speak some word of reassurance at such a time.

Because travel out of London was already heavy, with the school evacuation schedules and the cars of those Londoners who had places in the country to go to, and because any possible movement of troops would further disorganize traffic to the north and west; because people who wanted to see me safely off were impatient to be away themselves, and because all my heavy luggage had to travel with me as the checking system was entirely unreliable now—I was taking a Thursday night train to Liverpool for a Friday night boat. Telegraph and telephone facilities were so overtaxed that it had taken hours to verify my Liverpool reservations, and once I got there I should be well cut off from London. Until you have held to your best friends' hands and said, in a voice carefully steadied before you began, "If anything—spectacular—happens, you'll cable me about yourselves, won't you?" you have missed one of the chillier aspects of impending war.

I had dinner in the Liverpool train, but I don't remember much about it. The talks at Munich were still going on. There was no radio in the hotel, and there were no late editions of the Liverpool newspapers.

I shall never know the exact dimensions of the Adelphi Hotel at Liverpool, but it will always seem to me to have the biggest lounge, the biggest dining-room, and the biggest bathtubs in the world. Except in very modern flat buildings, the English are still likely to be ceremonious about bathrooms. It is rare to find a bathroom opening off the bedroom like a cupboard—that is, unless it *was* a cupboard to begin with. When they set out to do a bathroom, as it were from the ground up, they really let themselves go. Often there is

a sort of tiled lobby, meaning nothing much, with towels, perhaps, and a clothes-hamper, and a mirrored dressing-table; and way off in the middle distance down gleaming vistas of tile, sometimes beyond even another door—the works.

At the Adelphi you entered my simple overnight quarters through an immense door from the passage into a square vestibule with a—no fooling—branching hat-rack designed to accommodate a family of six. To your left the door of the bedroom stood open; a room not by any means small, but by the time they had got the bed and the mantelpiece and the dressing-table and the wardrobe, all outsize, into it, it seemed as crowded as a Tourist class stateroom for one. The bathroom, which was behind a tall glazed door also opening off the private vestibule, was of a size to dance sarabands in, and the tub would have sufficed to drown a Guardsman. Not being a strong swimmer myself, I had to hold on to something with one hand the whole time, which left only one hand for the soap and splashing. Oddly enough I was able to see that this was pretty funny at the time. I remember sitting in the half-filled tub of water, gripping the sponge-rack lest I come adrift and go under, and snickering in a helpless sort of way. By the time I had got out again the joke was over, and the fact that for fear of a ducking I had not been able to let go and lie down and have a long hot soak with my eyes shut—why do one's feet float?—had got home to me as an inconvenience which etched itself into my soul.

I went to bed with a book, and I don't remember much about that either. There were planes over Liverpool all night too.

As usual I woke with a start and leaped to the door for the morning papers. "PEACE" was stretched across the col-

umns. An agreement had been signed at Munich at 1:30 A.M. Goering had slapped Daladier on the back. Mussolini was described as "elated." And Chamberlain? Tired, I should think, and not at all "elated." But the guns were still silent. England drew a long breath, printed further ARP news on the same page, and went right on digging trenches.

I went down to breakfast at the Adelphi, and with another newspaper propped against the tea-pot I noticed what good scrambled eggs you get in Liverpool. I noticed too that the *Aquitania*, scheduled out of Southampton on October 5th with a full passenger list, had been withdrawn from service without explanation, and that her passengers would have to be accommodated on other later sailings. The German liners were already withdrawn, leaving hundreds stranded.

There was another day before the boat sailed, which had to be got through somehow, so I set out to get acquainted with Liverpool. Facing the steps of the hotel as I emerged from the revolving door after breakfast, was a newspaper pitch with framed placards. "PEACE" stood alone on one in immense purple capitals. "MUNICH AGREEMENT SIGNED," on another. "NO WAR: OFFICIAL." They looked very handsome, even through a fine rain.

You hear a lot about Liverpool's new modern cathedral. I set out after breakfast, rather in the mood for cathedrals, on foot. It was not quite raining, and the streets approaching the cathedral are not, I am sure, Liverpool's best. At last you climb a hill and come round a corner, and there it is, all over scaffolding.

It is made of rusty red stone, dark against a slate-coloured sky. There is no entrance in the end which faces towards you, and a sign on the board fence which encloses it points round to the right. The only door now available is obscure, and up

a flight of rusty red stone steps. It's not the right colour, I was thinking, as I got the heavy door open at last and entered the most extraordinary place I have ever seen.

The inside of it is rusty red too. The choir, which is apparently finished, ends abruptly in three rows of wooden chairs which back directly on the scaffolding and face the altar, which was covered that morning with a dirty dust-sheet. As I entered they were testing the organ, playing chromatic scales way down into the bass like thunder, and talking it over between times in echoing voices. There were a few lights on in the chandeliers above the choir, and the scaffolding beyond was covered with what in the theatre would be called working-lights.

I found an effigy tomb, in the same red stone. It was the first bishop of Liverpool, and he died in 1900. The effigy when inspected more closely was modernistic. I'm afraid I don't like this, I was thinking as I mounted a couple of steps into the side of the choir. The altar screen was heavily gilded, and everywhere else was the dark red stone. At floor level, across the choir, was a little electric sign, a permanent fixture, and it read in green illuminated letters:

CAUTION

FOUR STEPS

DOWN

Exactly like a cinema. There were electric switches in the pillars themselves at the back of the choir. As I rounded the end and came down the other side, they abandoned the organ and turned off most of what lights there were and went away. The working-lights on the scaffolding glared. Three or four other people had come in and stood about dazedly, looking

the way I felt. There was a monument-thing with a wreath that said "Salonika."

I sat down in one of the wooden chairs below the choir and tried to take things in and envision the completed building. *Somebody* must like it, I thought, sitting there, while a workman tramped loudly along the wooden flooring behind me.

Then something happened.

A short, stumpy woman in a shabby grey tweed coat and a black hat, with wispy hair, came in the door as though in a hurry. She went straight to the end of the row nearest the entrance and dropped to her knees on the stone floor and buried her face in her dreadful, work-worn hands and was still. To her, in spite of everything, it was a church—and the word on the placards was PEACE.

7. "*Trouble in the Balkans in the Spring*"

THE boat trip up from Liverpool to Glasgow and then to Galway was one of the most beautiful, scenically, that I have ever experienced. I mean to return some day to the Western Islands, having seen them first through a haze of soul-destroying fatigue the like of which it is difficult to describe. My brains would not think, and my body would not move. Temporarily I had stopped ticking.

I felt a continual dim desire to return to London, a dim resentment of the thoughtful, well-intentioned people who in the midst of their own travail had seen to it that I did what they thought was best for me. I could still forfeit the passage and get off at the next stop, of course. But there was a trunk in the lower regions of the ship. The flat in London was given up. Everybody I knew had gone to the country. . . . Out of an abysmal inertia I watched the coastline drop away astern.

It was a foul passage, lasting twelve days.

✦

The thing was done. For better or for worse, a decision had been made at Munich. For better or for worse, the guns were still silent, the young men were not dying by thousands. The world lay like a spent swimmer on the shore, gasping

for breath. It became vocal, not to say loquacious, soon enough.

The question as to what would have happened if the four men at Munich had done otherwise may never be answered with any real finality. In view of what happened eleven months later when no compromise was made, most people are now inclined to say: War. And in that case it would have been a war in which London and Paris could have been bombed at once without fear of prompt reprisal or adequate defence, and Prague would have taken what Warsaw got a year later. It is possible that Hitler was just as ready for war in 1938 as he proved to be in 1939, and the Allies were certainly less ready. It is possible that for that reason Hitler would have preferred it to start a year before it did. There is a well-authenticated story that when he realized at Munich that his demands were actually going to be met after all, he went from incredulous surprise into turgescent fury, and was with difficulty induced by his colleagues to sign the Munich document as it stood. It is possible that Hitler had underestimated the Allies' desperate necessity for delay, even after the thing was upon them, and that until March, 1939, he considered that he had been diddled at Munich; fobbed off with much less than he could have got by war.

A correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* wrote:

"Those who oppose the Franco-British solution of the Sudetenland problem may fairly be asked to discriminate as to what it is that they condemn. Few of them are ready to avow that they would prefer a certain war now to a possible war later on. . . . We have to consider what would follow if, after years of war, Germany was defeated. Would the Allies give Sudetenland to Czechoslovakia? That would be

to ensure the repetition of the trouble of today. If, on the other hand, they made a durable settlement based on local desires, they would be producing precisely what they had fought to prevent."

Oddly enough, it was an American paper, the New York *Times*, no less, which got the thing into the smallest nutshell:

"Let no man say too high a price has been paid for peace in Europe until he has searched his own soul and found himself willing to risk in war the lives of those who are nearest and dearest to him."

At Berlin on September 26th, 1938, Hitler had said: "The Sudetenland is the last territorial claim which I have to make in Europe. I have assured Mr. Chamberlain, and I emphasize it now, that when this problem is solved Germany has no more territorial problems in Europe. I have further assured him that at the moment when the Czechs shall have come to an understanding with their other minorities—I shall not be interested in the Czech State any more, and that, so far as I am concerned, I can guarantee it."

Less than six months later, he was to enter Prague as a conqueror, and a man fatally and forever forsworn.

But for a few days in October—not much more—England dared to hope that now except for the question of colonies (which, said Hitler, were not a matter for war) Germany would pipe down. There was rueful counting up of what Hitler had gained on the deal—mines, breweries, arms-factories, spas—although all but the professional Cassandras conceded that these gains would be considerably nullified by

difficulties of transportation, lack of co-operation by the canny Czechs, some sabotage, and a sure desertion of places like Carlsbad by people like Baldwin and by tourists in general. It was still impossible for the man in the street not to hope that the nightmare was over. Peace for our time, they said. And after that? Well, perhaps some form of diplomacy would have evolved by then which would mean peace for our children's time too. After all, no one over there in Germany was immortal! There was, therefore, a brief peace boom in the shops and theatres and restaurants, and a gay Christmas was forecast.

Russia was, of course, snubbed and unfriendly. And Poland, with whom it had long been a matter of not hating Germany less but Russia more, was quibbling. "If there is to be a complete solution of the Central European problem, and if guarantees for the new boundaries of Czechoslovakia are to be given, it is impossible to count on a guarantee on the part of Poland so long as Polish interests have not been upheld," said a Polish spokesman. In other words, if Teschen was not handed over to Poland in the carve-up, Poland would march in and take it. Which they did.

Before the end of the year, came the brutal Nazi reprisals on the Jews for the shooting of a German diplomat in Paris by a crazed refugee Jewish boy. And already the "What next?" riddle of Nazi aggression was resolving itself into Memel or Danzig. In the rump state of Czechoslovakia the Slovaks were demanding complete autonomy and claiming Nazi "protection." The British First Lord of the Admiralty resigned with considerable *éclat*, because of his "profound distrust of the Government's foreign policy." There was much outspokenness about the shocking muddle which was being made of Home Defence even now that the emergency

was past. And the phrase "umbrella diplomacy" came into being as a term of opprobrium.

Civil war continued to rage in Spain during the winter, and Italy began to twist France's tail with strutting references to African colonies. "Tunis—Corsica—Jibuti!" demanded the students of Rome in well-drilled Fascist chorus. "We want Vesuvius and Venice!" retorted the irrepressible Parisians with improvised banners, and only Italy could refrain from a national snicker.

It is an odd sensation now to re-read the 1938-9 winter headines—how we hoped for peace, and went on saying that "war is not inevitable." But by spring it became fashionable to be a pessimist, until a lot of not-so-fashionable people felt that if they heard the "wishful thinking" cliché tossed out loftily just once more they would scream the place down. A new crisis was predicted for March 1, and when it didn't arrive on the dot there was some journalistic crowing. Placid plans were being made for the Canadian visit of the King and Queen; less placid plans for the New York World's Fair, which was to be attended by one of the three original copies of Magna Carta, as well as by their Majesties.

On March 15th, Hitler crossed the hypothetical boundary-line of Czechoslovakia and absorbed what was left of the country into the Reich, as he had done with Austria a year before. The capitals of Europe were divided between horror and a guilty sort of anger, for the world was then still capable of being surprised by Hitler's capacity to break his own word.

Within the next six months he demanded—and received—Memel from Lithuania, and determined to possess the free city and port of Danzig plus a corridor across the Polish Corridor which would completely cut Poland's access to the

sea. And yet on September 26th, 1938, in his "last territorial claim" speech at Berlin he had said: "Germany and Poland are two nations, and these nations will live, and neither of them will be able to do away with the other. I recognize all this, and we must all recognize that a people of 33,000,000 will always strive for an outlet to the sea."

Poland, who had been aboard the Nazi band-wagon when Czechoslovakia was being parcelled out and had wangled the rich mining district of Teschen as her share of the booty, now realized with a sickening bump that she too had German minorities. (There were, of course, Polish minorities in Germany, but everybody pretended not to n-o-t-i-c-e them.) Poland began to look round rather wildly for help. Her number was up. She was next. The Danzig Henlein was named Forster. The routine was the same as it had been in Czechoslovakia—indignant and passionate demands for return to the Reich; oppressed and tortured Germans in Poland; local "incidents"; and so forth. Poland already had a treaty with France similar to the one which had existed between France and Czechoslovakia. On April 1st Britain also guaranteed the frontiers of Poland. And this was something, because Britain had had no direct pledge to Czechoslovakia. Instantly Hitler raised the old German yelp of "encirclement" which had been heard back in 1914.

On Good Friday Italy took Albania. It was almost as simple as that. There was shooting, of course, and Albanians were killed, and the young Queen had to flee the capital at the risk of her life and that of her two-days-old son. But Italy took Albania. "An Italian foothold becomes an Italian stronghold," was the way one paper put it. Jugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey now began to worry, to say nothing of Rumania.

On April 13th, at a momentous session of the House of Commons, Mr. Chamberlain made another of his unoratorical speeches which so exasperated those of his colleagues who liked their Ministers to play to the gallery a bit, and give a man something to dine out on that evening. He quoted the statement of the Italian Chargé d'Affaires to Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, to the effect that if Britain were to seize Corfu, an island off the Albanian coast, Italy would guarantee "very serious consequences." (Laughter in the House.) He then quoted Halifax's reply that Britain would take "a very grave view if anybody else occupied Corfu." (Cheers and laughter.) And then, so quietly that the House hardly realized what had happened to it, he said: "In the event of any action being taken which clearly threatens the independence of Greece or Rumania and which the Greek or Rumanian Government respectively considers it vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty's Government will feel bound to lend at once to the Greek or Rumanian Government, as the case might be, all the support in their power." ("What about Russia?" demanded an Opposition Member. And Mr. Chamberlain replied calmly that Britain was still negotiating for an "agreement" with Russia too.)

And so there was Britain, somewhat astonished and, like the Elephant's Child, a little warm—pledged to Poland, angling for Russia, and furthermore, planted bang in the middle of the eternal Balkan question of sinister memory.

From then on, one way or another, we were "for it."

"Talking of war, there'll be trouble in the Balkans in the spring," the Nilghai used to say, as he pulled the Binkie-dog's ears. It is a remark which, like many others in the works of Rudyard Kipling, does not date. The Nilghai prophesied in the '80's, while Gordon was still trapped at

Khartoum. The trouble in the Balkans which the Nilghai anticipated materialized at last in 1912. But his prophecy was still worth the paper it was printed on in 1939—though Jugoslavia and Albania are not names he would have recognized as sovereign states, and he would look in vain on modern maps for Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Montenegro.

Kipling and his Nilghai are dead, but "The Light That Failed" still lives, reeking of gunpowder and tobacco and sweat and blood, quick with army wit, weird in its intimate knowledge of the feel of another man's craft. There never was anybody able to talk shop, anybody's shop, as Kipling could.

He was very much alive himself that day in 1928 when we had tea with him at Brown's Hotel in London, and he told the story—which he never wrote—about the little dog who had been born on a battleship and had never seen grass. That was a day which belongs to those same high, far-off times before September, 1938, which now seem so cruelly long ago. And unlike some other halcyon days of the pre-Nazi era, its twin cannot possibly come again.

His laughter was a thing to remember always. When he came to Bermuda in 1930 in one of the white Lady boats, for to admire and for to see, we were there; and at Government House on his best behaviour he talked to me of the prison library at Princetown on Dartmoor, and explained how difficult it was to get the right sort of books for the men. Across the table from him that day as his host sat a man he might have written, a man I had read many times over in the India books—but because he was so utterly in the Kipling tradition no one ever suspected General Sir Louis Bols of half the things that had happened to him. I never knew a man able to say less about himself, always with the bland appearance of

having told All. Early in our acquaintance I had got through with a well-placed remark about Ctesiphon. He was so astonished that I'd ever heard of the Mesopotamian campaign (he had been with Allenby in Palestine) that he talked shop to me ever afterward, with only a little prodding now and then. And his talk was sheer Kipling.

On another day in Bermuda in 1930, as I drove into Hamilton down the hill past the hospital, I saw a small, rather bent figure toiling towards me on foot, with a mackintosh carried over one shoulder on a hooked thumb. And I realized with a shock that Kipling wasn't young any more. He didn't see me, and my carriage had passed him before I could stop it. I got out and ran back up the hill after him. He seemed surprised and pleased to be hailed. We sat down on a low stone wall and talked. There was no laughter in him that morning. His wife, who had been ill but had eaten a hearty luncheon at Government House a few days before, was back in the hospital and he spent all day every day there. "She doesn't like to be alone," he said simply. He took off his hat, a very battered felt, and laid it on his knee, kicking his heels against the wall as we talked. And there beside the white curve of the road, with carriages and bicycles going by, and a threat of rain which made the Bermuda air cool and soft like Sussex in summer, I felt I had never known him so well, nor ever would again. His guard was down that day. It was impossible, in the circumstances, for him to visit our island laboratory at the other end of Bermuda and behold there certain wonders of the deep he had been promised, and he had the resigned but wistful disappointment of a disciplined child. His eyes behind their thick spectacles would rest vaguely on the palms and lawns and bright flowers beyond their short focus, and then come suddenly to my face, bright,

and very knowing. I should hate to have something on my conscience, when I talked to him. I should hate to try to lie to him.—You see, it is impossible even now to write of him as though he is dead. I have heard it said that the loss of his son in the Great War broke his heart. I myself have seen him a little sad, and I think lonely, and perhaps feeling all his years. But now that he is gone, I still see him as I saw him first, rocking with laughter in that vast private sitting-room at Brown's Hotel.

There is perhaps no man's lifetime that formed so vivid and living a bridge from the gay old imperial days of the 19th century to the stern last stand of today, as Rudyard Kipling's—with the possible exception of Baden-Powell, whose deeds match the other man's words, which still "march up and down in the hearts of their hearers." Kipling saw a peck of trouble in his day, and his prophetic soul, like the Nilghai's, knew where more was coming from, as witness the last sentence in his autobiography. He saw warfare change from a thing men could face with a song and a high heart—and a chance of living through it to come out with a V.C.—to the senseless horror of civilian bombardment. He saw and lived with the last war involving England which had any shreds of the picturesque about it—which was the last war but two, counting this one.

The turn of the century found Kipling at Bloemfontein, South Africa, in the middle of the Boer War. There was a fantastic cosiness about that affair in South Africa which with every year that passes grows more fascinating to contemplate. It is barely a generation behind us in time, but it is as remote in its daily details as Waterloo. Infinitely greater changes took place in the last fourteen years of the century which separated Waterloo from the first battle of the Marne

than in the other eighty-six. Compared to what happened in 1914, the South African business was only a rugger scrum, and viewed in the shadow of the Flanders fighting in 1940, it was more like taking tea in the rectory garden.

In his capacity of Special Correspondent, Kipling witnessed the battle of Karee Siding in 1900, just to check up on his facts. It was that sort of war. You rode a few miles out of town and watched awhile, and then rode back. Sometimes you lent a hand with the wounded on the way in, or carried a message. Sometimes something hit you or your horse—did I say you rode a horse?—but the chances of injury to a non-combatant were comparatively small. Conan Doyle went to South Africa to see the war too, and Edgar Wallace was already there, in the army.

War-correspondents, in those remote and simple times, were sent out to the scene of action after the shooting had started, and their job was to report what happened there; which they did in plain language without many excursions into their own personal reactions or opinions or politics—even without regarding themselves as major prophets. They shared the hardships and labours of the troops, and must have been rather nice fellows to know. As for instance Mr. Lynch of the *Illustrated London News*, who was caught in the siege of Ladysmith:

"It may be remembered that Mr. Lynch wearied of the inaction of Ladysmith, and tried to pass over into the Boer lines in search of 'copy,' but was arrested as a spy. Although Mr. Lynch and the Boers got on fairly well together, it was only after urgent representations from London that he was released as a non-combatant. Some of his sketches he had to destroy while he was in Pretoria, lest they should give

information to the enemy; but one non-committal sketch of great interest he was able to preserve, and it is here reproduced. It pictures the Boer prisoners who are at present detained in Ladysmith Jail."

In the name of "progress" let's look for a few minutes at the most extensive war which England had ever fought before 1914, and which a lot of us can't remember.

The Boer War was three months old in January after the "black Christmas" of 1899. Things were not going well. Baden-Powell was besieged at Mafeking, Rhodes was shut up in Kimberley, and French had only just succeeded in getting out of Ladysmith before it too was cut off, with a large British force rendered helpless inside the town. It was not possible in the dark ages of 1900 to blast a town and its inhabitants clean off the map. You had to dig in all round it, and in the uncivilized fashion of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries slowly starve it to death or surrender.

General Buller, whose reputation as a soldier had so far been sound, now involved himself and his troops in relief attempts which turned out a series of disasters, taking a heavy toll of English lives, especially among the young officers. We can't have this sort of thing going on, said the British Government in effect, and despatched both Roberts and Kitchener to Cape Town in the last week of the old century.

Kitchener at fifty was Sirdar of the Egyptian Army, with headquarters at Khartoum. Roberts at sixty-eight had retired into a field-marshalship in the Irish command, and he sailed from Southampton. Kitchener joined the ship at Gibraltar, as Roberts' Chief-of-Staff.

Where in the wars of the last thirty years or the next

thirty would there be scope for a man like Roberts of Kandahar—"Bobs Bahadur"—who was born at Cawnpore in 1832 and got back from Sandhurst in time to earn his V.C. in the Mutiny! His whole career on the Northwest Frontier was beyond anything Kipling ever wrote, for accomplishing the spectacular impossible. He was a legend in the army before he was fifty—which was 'way back in the '80's.

It is difficult to choose the best story to illustrate the idolized little man's methods of greatness. I suppose this one will do as well as any:

"At Dreefontein he came to where the naval battery was and sat down on a camp-stool brought for him by his Indian attendant. He spoke to the officer in command of the battery cheerily, and now and then he asked the younger officers a question.

"All the time he was smiling and looking most pleased, though for its size there has not been a hotter battle in the war. Gallopers and staff-officers came and went, bringing news and taking away orders. 'Tell Colonel So-and-So to move a little forward and to the left.' 'Say that I wish So-and-So would push forward.' It was all as quietly and calmly said and done, there in the heat of the battle and within range of the enemy's guns—as calmly and quietly done as ever a bank-manager issued orders to his clerks on a dull afternoon. And, just as suddenly as he came, the Field-Marshal sprang up and walked away, with the Indian and the chair at his heels."

You see what an informal little war it was. And yet it was by no means a little war in any sense of the word. It covered a lot of ground, from Colesberg northeast to Pre-

toria, from Colenso west to Kimberley; and it lasted about three years. Its tactics seem pitiably naïve to people who have beheld, via the cinema, the underground intricacies of the Maginot Line. Less than forty years ago, would you believe it, soldiers lay on their stomachs behind a boulder and fired rifles at each other, and the wounded were carried away in covered waggons. Scouting and reconnaissance were done by mounted men with field-glasses and sketch-books. Here is a sober example of what was then commonplace reporting:

"Of the various duties which cavalry have to perform, 'drawing fire' is by no means the pleasantest. It being necessary to find out if certain kopjes are occupied by Boers, the only means by which the cavalry told off for this duty can ascertain it is to ride forward until they are fired upon, and as the Boers are generally well concealed, there is never much chance of making any satisfactory reply. Sometimes our cavalry force the Boers to disclose themselves by a clever scouting ruse. They ride up to the neighbourhood of a possible hiding place, then halt and eagerly scan it, shading their eyes with their hands. They see nothing; but they pretend to have seen the hidden foe, and suddenly turning, gallop away back as if to give information. The Boers, thinking they have been discovered, open fire, thus betraying themselves."

It's a cute idea. But it must have given you rather an odd feeling between the shoulder-blades as you turned and galloped away back as if to give information.

Despatches were carried by gallopers, by native runners, even by war-correspondents in the line of duty. Battles on a grand scale were directed by officers in touch with the

least of their men, and often within sight of the enemy—as much as anybody ever got within sight of the Boers.

There were no wireless communications, of course, almost no motor transport, hardly any form of aerial facilities—though we mustn't forget the captive balloon. Here is the caption beneath its photograph in the *Graphic:* "The observation balloon at Ladysmith, which is here shown about to ascend, is much disliked by the Boers, who regard it as an unfair device in war." (I don't think the *Graphic*—or the Boers—meant to be funny.)

No wireless, remember. Which brings us to this dramatic item from the *Graphic* in the previous autumn, just at the time of the Boer ultimatum which precipitated the war:

"Our Special Artist, who went out to the Cape on the *Tintagel Castle*, writes:—'We were two days from Cape Town when we met the *Dunvegan Castle* homeward bound. . . . Word came down from the bridge that a vessel was in sight on the port bow, and all crowded along the bulwarks to get a glimpse of her. The excitement of this moment was intense. Slowly but surely three masts and a big red funnel rose above the horizon, and presently the hull of the *Dunvegan Castle* came into view. The Captain altered course several points and closed in on her. We watched while the flags which made the query, 'Is it peace or war?' fluttered up from the bridge to the masthead, and then we waited for the answer. Presently three flags fluttered above her bridge —a white pennant with a red ball in its centre; then another pennant, half yellow and half blue; and below these two a square red flag with a yellow cross on it. A pause; and then again four others flew aloft to join their fellows. This was the message, and the flags came tumbling down like

wounded birds upon her deck. Our eyes turned instinctively towards the captain, and some one on the bridge said in a low voice, 'War—last Wednesday.' "

It was only forty years later, on September 3rd, 1939, that the English liner *Athenia*, outward bound from Liverpool and Glasgow with a passenger list of women and children and American students returning home from the danger zone, received the news promptly by wireless that England and France were at war—again—with Germany. They congratulated themselves that they had caught a boat in time. They had got away before it started. That night as they were going down to dinner the *Athenia* was struck by two torpedoes from a German submarine, and then was shelled from the surface till she sank, with a loss of nearly 200 lives.

Submarines had long been invented in 1899, of course. A sort of submarine sank the *Housatonic* during the American Civil War. France had launched one in 1888. Germany completed two in 1890. Italy had one in 1892. Britain would place an order for five in 1900. But it wouldn't occur to anybody to use them against passenger ships carrying women and children for another fifteen years. It was the *Lusitania* then.

In South Africa motor transport was very new, limited, and untrustworthy. Heavy guns were manoeuvred into position by long lines of men on ropes, which made a very good target for snipers, or by teams of horses which could be shot down, thus disabling the gun. The merciful final bullet between the eyes of a favourite animal was rather discouraged by the higher-ups, because spasmodic firing in the rear might prove "demoralizing" to the men in an advance.

Whenever possible, disabled horses were killed by the search parties succouring the wounded.—I can't seem to get over this. Maybe it isn't important.

Guns abandoned or captured because they could not be moved were often a serious loss, and a great many tall tales centred round their rescue under fire, and a great many glorious deeds were done.

There is a good reason, as you will see, for contemplating somewhat in detail the action at Colenso in December, 1899—besides the fact that it was an entirely typical fracas at that time.

"At six o'clock on the morning of Friday, December 15th, General Buller attempted to cross the Tulega near the village of Colenso. Colonel Long of the Royal Field Artillery selected a position 800 yards from the river. Scarcely had he given the order to unlimber than the Boer guns on the kopjes behind Colenso, and their rifles from the trenches along the river, and from Fort Wylie, began showering a murderous storm on the men of the 14th and 66th Batteries. Colonel Long and Colonel Hunt, who commanded the batteries, were both wounded. Our ammunition gave out, and our men had to retire till it was replenished, hoping to go back to the guns. That, however, was impossible, so deadly was the Boer fire: and the guns had to be abandoned. In the course of the day two brave attempts were made to recover them. Captain Schofield, General Buller's A.D.C., Captain Congreve, the Press Censor, and the Hon. F. H. S. Roberts [Lord Roberts's only son, who had acted as General Clery's A.D.C.] with about six drivers, including Corporal Nurse, harnessed two teams to the limber and galloped out to the guns with them. On the way Lieutenant Roberts was

wounded in three places, and Captain Congreve was hit in the leg as he dismounted. Strange to say, his companions were not touched, in spite of a terrific fire, and they succeeded in bringing back two guns. Then Captain Read, of the 7th Battery, rode down with a team of waggon horses, but while they were being harnessed they were almost all shot, and he was forced to return after being wounded in the thigh. General Buller then forbade any further attempts being made to rescue the guns which had been lost with such grim results."

Thus the account in the *Sphere*. General Buller in his own report, which came through later, made no bones about placing the blame on Colonel Long, who was apparently reckless to the point of puerility.

"I had personally explained to him [Long] where I wished him to come into action, and with the Naval guns only, as the position was not within effective range for his field guns. Instead of this, he advanced with his batteries so fast that he left both his Infantry escort and his oxen-drawn Naval guns behind, and came into action under Fort Wylie, a commanding, trebly entrenched hill, at a range of 1,200 yards, and I believe within 300 yards of the enemy's rifle pits. The men fought their guns like heroes and silenced Fort Wylie, but the issue had never been in doubt, and gradually they were all shot."

Oxen-drawn Naval guns. "Gradually" they were all shot. Sit a moment and think. This was the dawn of the 20th century.

I said there was a reason for dwelling on Colenso. Con-

greve, Read, Nurse, and young Roberts, all wounded, all received the V.C. It was Congreve who, already wounded himself, saw Roberts fall and went out and brought him in. A photograph of Roberts in the striking dark green uniform of the King's Royal Rifles, shows an exceptionally handsome boy of twenty-seven, looking younger. He died of his wounds three days after the battle. And when Lord Roberts arrived at Cape Town to begin the campaign, his sleeve was banded with black.

The South African war made Britain very unpopular on the Continent, especially when it began to be seen that she was winning. France was not very friendly to begin with, and the German attitude under Wilhelm II was ambiguous at best. Wilhelm was still afraid of his grandmother, the English Queen. But it remained for the *Graphic* to put its finger on the real sore spot abroad:

"One of the bitterest grievances entertained against us by the military nations of the Continent is that, unlike them, we do not keep up a conscript army based on the principle of universal liability to military service. During our late week of humiliation, when three severe checks to our arms followed on each other with such startling rapidity in South Africa, the French, as usual with our friends the enemy across the Channel, set up a chorus of exultation combined with an expression of the conviction that now, at last, if we would not see our world-wide Empire totter to its base, we should have to accept conscription, which we had so long and so stubbornly resisted. In all this Continental outcry there was a curious hypocrisy of poor malicious human nature. What really was at the bottom of it all was that the critics of Paris and Berlin resented our immunity from an

institution which had weighed so long and so heavily on the prosperity of their respective countries, and that they wanted to see us saddled with the same enfeebling military burdens as themselves. Their sudden solicitude for our national welfare was, in fact, of a kind similar to that reforming zeal of Macaulay's Puritans, who sternly forbade bear-baiting—not so much because it gave pain to the bear, as because it gave pleasure to the spectators. Knowing the economic curse that conscription is to themselves, our Continental friends, who have our welfare so deeply at heart, would be only too delighted to see us groaning under the same misfortune. But they will be disappointed.

"For it is the opinion of our best experts, including Lord Wolseley, that the system of voluntary enlistment is quite sufficient for the military needs of our Empire—broad-based as it is upon individual liberty and popular will—and, if there were any doubters on this subject, they must have been converted to this view by the wave of patriotic enthusiasm which swept over the whole Empire, and in particular over these tight little islands, when the Government lately made an appeal to our army of citizen soldiers to join the ranks of our regular forces in South Africa, and thus raise them to a strength capable of coping with the biggest and most serious military problem with which we have had to deal for many a long year."

So the South African war was fought and won with volunteers. Conscription was resorted to finally during the Great War, but was dropped immediately after peace came.

On April 26th, 1939, Mr. Chamberlain announced in the House that compulsory military service for boys between eighteen and twenty-one would be introduced in Britain.

Britain took it philosophically. France was pleased. But it was not conscription on a scale to impress the totalitarians much. Germany said: "We are indifferent to Britain's methods of organising her defence." Italy said: "Britain is giving her amateur soldiers a military training during the five o'clock tea hour and during the week-end."

But it got home, all the same. It meant that Britain meant business, as almost no other measure on Britain's part could have done. Hitler promptly tore up two more treaties—the Anglo-German Naval Pact of 1935, and the German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact of 1934. Stalin sacked Litvinoff and most of his Foreign Office staff, and Molotoff, who had never been out of Russia and knew no language but Russian, became the new Soviet Foreign Minister. Ciano and Ribbentrop met at Como to discuss Italy's views on Danzig. And—*regardez!*—Russia opened a new campaign of radio attack on Germany.

On May 12th Turkey joined the "peace front" with Britain and France. More encirclement, screamed Hitler. On May 17th King George and Queen Elizabeth landed at Quebec to begin a tour which could hardly be surpassed for the loyalty and good-will it evoked both from their Canadian subjects and their American neighbours. The Anglo-Soviet negotiations dragged on, giving rise to recriminations. The Opposition said Chamberlain wasn't really trying. Nobody was sure what Molotoff was saying, though.

The King and Queen arrived home safely from Canada at the end of June. During July the Anglo-Soviet pact still hung fire and the Danzig menace grew. I was in New York, writing a book again. This one. Whatever was going to happen, I had to see. Nobody thought there would be a war. Not really. Well, not till after the harvest was in. . . .

At the end of July I sailed.

8. Here We Go Again

THERE was a wheeze going round in the spring of 1939 which alluded to the man who had left America and gone to England to get away from the crises. I thought of him more than once after I arrived in London in July, and settled into a flat just across the corridor from where I had been living in 1938, and Mrs. Richmond turned up beaming to look after me. The London papers were distinctly less alarming than the New York ones. Everything seemed so normal, and the sun shone, and it appeared that the angels sang. War? No, of course not.

Except for one thing. The boat-train had got into London late at night. When I woke next morning Mrs. Richmond was already in the kitchen, washing up from my midnight snack. She brought me my hot water and lemon juice, and left the bedroom curtains closed, as I prefer them—the bathroom window was frosted glass—and so I had not yet looked out on London's 1939 sky-line when her voice came to me from the kitchen: "And what do you think of the bar-rage balloons, mum?"

Yes, there they were, shining silver in the morning light, three of them, above Paddington and Maida Vale. I saw them first through the kitchen window over Mrs. Richmond's plump shoulder, her matter-of-fact voice running on beside me. There were always a few of them up now—would be

till after the trial blackout on August 10th, anyway—nobody knew how many there really were, they never all went up at once—nobody knew exactly what good they would do, seemed as though a plane could dodge them, didn't it—of course they could fly much higher than that, some people said they could go so high as to be almost out of sight—didn't seem possible, did it—pretty things, weren't they—but still . . .

Very pretty. And very disturbing. Not quite the sort of thing you expected to find round London.

No web of knotted cable depends from the balloons, which do not ring the city from its outskirts but are peppered all over it at irregular intervals, each with a single mooring thread which is almost invisible. Spaced as they were then, it might have been just possible to dodge between their cables, even at a bomber's speed. But with hundreds more in the air at one time, as there could be, enemy planes would have to stay above them, or at a height of, say, 20,000 feet. Thus their apparent usefulness lay in preventing any sort of accurate aim, to say nothing of dive-bombing or machine-gunning from above; and to say nothing of the mental hazard to the enemy pilot approaching at terrific speed with no idea of where he would first encounter the outermost balloon of the gigantic cluster and get a wing sheared off by the mooring cable.

A few days later, on one of my prowls in Hyde Park during a pouring rain, I came upon the place where one of the balloons lived, and walked out across the grass to where a sagging, ineffectual rope was strung along three-foot poles to mark off its precincts from a public which showed no inclination to intrude. The balloon itself was at the time partly deflated and sulking on its mooring ropes a few feet above

the ground, its two hind wings dragging—looking as though it wanted its lunch. It was surprisingly small—about sixty feet long and thirty feet high—and its equipment was very simple. It was tethered to a motor-truck of what seemed infinitesimal proportions, it had a few green sand-bags attached and a few extras scattered about, there were a couple of small tents for the accommodation of its nursemaids—two or three khaki lads who sat on park chairs under a tree, surveying the weather with boredom and resignation. That was all. No bustle, no "regulations," no self-conscious mystery, no sentries, no *Verbotens*. Just a London barrage balloon at its post. Have a look, and welcome. Nice weather, I don't think!

It was very thought-provoking to stand as I did many times during the comparatively quiet days of early August, 1939, with my elbows on a little iron gate in the pleached walk of the sunken garden near Kensington Palace, looking out across the snap-dragons and the pool and the pigeons towards the Round Pond, where children's kites bobbed and fluttered in the sunlight against a blue sky dotted, at far greater heights, by those motionless silver sentinels of war. In the foreground, babies with their nannies, laughter and beauty, and a sense of deep security and sanity; and beyond those twenty-four miles of choppy Channel water which are no longer much defence to this island kingdom—what?

When last I had seen London, sand-dumps littered the pavements round the buildings in the heart of Town, and the parks were scarred with raw lines of freshly dug clay beside the gaping air-raid trenches. Now, less than eleven months later, children and dogs with a ball scampered heedlessly over long yellow gravel mounds in the green turf of the Gardens, where only two years before the peaceful can-

vas tents of the Coronation troops had stood. The trenches had been made permanent and covered over, with small trap-door entrances. There was some talk of making flower-beds on them, but nobody had got round to that. It was a somehow particularly nightmarish thought—to plant pink geraniums on top of an air-raid trench. But it did not arise out of any tendency on the part of the English to pretend that the trenches were not there at all. Britain had ceased in the past September to attempt not to n-o-t-i-c-e the European menace. The geraniums, if they had ever appeared, would have been just another evidence of the matter-of-factness of the British public towards a possible war, once the shock of the 1938 Crisis was over.

As was fully demonstrated during the Great War, the true cockney will grouse and gloom till things get really bad, and then he begins to wise-crack. After that, you can't down him. It was significant that all Britain was wise-cracking when I got back there in 1939. "THE BAD BOYS OF EUROPE" was a typical headline over the conference on August 13th of Ciano, Ribbentrop, and Hitler, with Mussolini and the Danzig Nazis in the immediate background. The weather—and it had been very horrid—was still as much discussed as international politics.

Everyone realized that the time for another September Crisis was upon us. Everyone hated and dreaded it. But it is impossible to be spectacular about the situation I returned to find in England, because of the determinedly unspectacular people who were living in it. The faces in the parks and restaurants and streets were normal and cheerful. In spite of a few big ARP posters and a few small black and white signs about ARP public shelters in the streets, and the ubiquitous, brooding balloons, London's outward aspect was

the same. Even the grave business of the ARP itself was illumined by this constitutional saneness of the English—which is distinctly different from though no less valuable than the more theatrical *insouciance* of the French.

I was guilty of trying to pump Mrs. Richmond for her own opinions, and gathered that her household was one of the old-fashioned kind where politics were relegated largely to the menfolk at the pub. Her husband was engaged in air-raid shelter construction, and thankful for the work, and he seemed to be taking the gloomy view. No one can be so gloomy as the cockney when he really tries, and I could imagine that the shelter workmen enjoyed jags of complete morbidity between the inevitable wise-cracks.

Little steel shelters were being supplied as free as the gas-masks, to households with an income of less than £5 a week ($25). It was objected in captious quarters that the scheme lacked delicacy in that it advertised the limits of the family income. But in most cases tiny back yard areas of unpaved earth which had hitherto grown a few flowers beneath the clotheslines were philosophically surrendered to the ugly necessity. In Germany not even gas-masks were supplied free to the civilian population. Germans were urged to buy them at a cost of about 5/ ($1.25).

There wasn't enough space, said Mrs. Richmond, where she lived, for a steel shelter, and so "We've got props up," she said. That is, her basement rooms had been braced by thick wooden props from within against collapse. The expense of these safety measures was borne by the ARP. Mrs. Richmond was not inclined to dwell on her props. She wanted to know if the egg was done right for my breakfast.

On August 1st the *Daily Express* had a front-page column which offered, in effect, five to one against war in 1939

—ten to one against war before September. August is the holiday month. Go away as usual and have a good time and don't worry, said all the newspapers—but by the way, take your gas-mask with you.

Respirators for babies were now ready for demonstration, with a very limited supply. They weighed six pounds, and consisted of "a padded hood with a large window, surrounded by a light metal frame fitted with an adjustable seat to prevent the infant from slipping out of the hood. Air is supplied by a pump bellows through a filter." Does it sound at all reassuring?

The House rose and Ministers went off on holiday themselves, after some cantankerousness on the part of a few members who seemed to feel that their continued daily presence at Westminster would prevent war from breaking out in Danzig. The rest agreed more or less with the Prime Minister, who apparently considered that with adequate arrangements for sudden recall a few days' fishing and shooting snatched now during the August lull would be all to the good in storing up strength and serenity of spirit when and if things hotted up later on.

"Not for us the happy years when a Long Vacation really was a vacation," said Firth in the *Telegraph*, "and Ministers alone need give a thought to business when a long, dusty session had been brought to a scrambling finish just in time for the Twelfth. Even Ministers paid but rare and perfunctory visits to their Departments to work off arrears or salve a Victorian conscience.

"As for ordinary members, they went their ways rejoicing that for a long spell they would be spared the sight and sound of colleagues who had become a bore, and of short-

tempered Whips who did not care whether your digestion was ruined or not. *Procul negotiis*—that was the idea; to be out of reach of letters that had to be answered. Had you suggested to a Victorian M.P. that he might be recalled to Westminster at 48 hours' notice or that a day would come when his successor would be up in arms if he were not recalled in a serious emergency, he would have thought you raving."

The Anglo-French Mission was off to Russia, headed by Admiral Plunkett-Ernle-Erle-Drax—"Old Plunk," who had been to Moscow with Beatty before the Great War. There were to be "military conversations." It was not an enviable job.

German army manoeuvres were beginning on a huge scale, and the troops appeared to be massed facing Poland, where there were preparations to celebrate at Cracow Cathedral the twenty-fifth anniversary of Pilsudski's march for Polish freedom. Poland was relying not only on Russia's non-aggression in the event of an attack by Germany, but on Russian supplies of arms. (The Polish-Russian Pact of 1932 had been re-affirmed in November, 1938, and there had been friendly conferences since then.) Rumania had 900,000 men under arms, France and Poland about 1,000,000 each. For some of the French soldiers it was the second call to the Maginot Line within the year. Hungary was feeling increasing pressure from the Reich and from internal Nazis. She had no Allied guarantee, but Mussolini was considered her more or less unofficial protector. Jugoslavia appeared firmly anti-Axis. Americans were arriving in Europe by droves, believing that the war-scare had diminished since July.

In England the confused tension of pre-Munich days and the post-Munich disillusionment had both given way to an odd equanimity which was on the surface almost normal, but which overlaid a profound national fed-upness that boded no good for somebody. They had an Air Force now which could cope with Goering's. They had seen to London's defences. They were training a steadily increasing conscript army of youths, which was unheard-of in England in peace time—aware that the peace was only technical, at best. The tribunals before which conscientious objectors—laconically known as "conchies"—appeared were conducted thoroughly but without Prussianism. It appears to be a matter of sober record that when the full count of the first quota registered had been called up and checked, only one man was discovered to be missing—and he had absent-mindedly joined up with the regulars in the interval.

During July and August it rained and rained, flooding out the military camps and causing considerable discomfort which was for the most part philosophically borne. There were lots of stories about the new army, with regard to which the word *conscript* was being adroitly avoided in favour of the word *militia*. I specially liked the one about the scholarly young man who had for weeks endured everything without complaint in what was to him a completely new and bewildering world, until a black rainy night when he slipped off the duckboard and landed on all fours in the mud, losing his spectacles—and after groping about in the wet for a while he rent the night with a heartfelt cry of *"Blahst Hitler!"*

And there was of course the one about the punctilious youngster who explained that he hadn't saluted his CO be-

cause after the telling-off he had got the day before he didn't think they were on speaking terms.

A barrage balloon went up in the Horse Guards Parade, where the Trooping of the Colour on the King's birthday takes place—an ancient ceremony which goes back more or less in its present form to the days of the Duke of Marlborough. I had seen it from the Admiralty balcony in 1930, and that year the Duke of Connaught was scheduled to ride for George V because of the King's recent illness. When the day came, June 3rd, the old Duke wasn't feeling up to it either, and so, without any announcement to the crowd massed along the route, it was the slender, always appealing figure of the Prince of Wales which led the way down the Mall and into the red square of the regiment drawn up to receive him. Slim little Wales, riding solemnly in father's place, in great-uncle's place, in the place which would one day be his; and a sort of visible murmur ran before him through the crowd—"The Prince!—It's Wales!—The Prince is taking the salute!—The Prince . . ." He rode it seemed thoughtfully, his right hand in its white glove hanging correctly at his side. He wore a red coat and a tall black bearskin, and the broad blue ribbon of the Garter slanted across his breast. His stirrups were slightly higher than anybody else's—"Like a jockey!" said my Admiral brightly, to no one in particular, and his eyes were very blue as he watched. The Prince had presumably mounted at the last minute the nice safe horse, trained to *stand*, which had been provided for the old Duke. And during the long march-past, while the Colonel's black beauty pawed and jingled and side-stepped in its own pretty way, and the Duke of York's roan shook its head and shifted its feet in dainty good spirits, the Prince's chestnut stood stolidly, its ears a little back, its

head too low, its feet planted, looking bored stiff. The Admiral's Lady said: "I do think the Prince might pull his horse together a bit, it looks as though it might lie down in a minute!" And as though he had heard, the Prince's left hand could be seen twitching at the reins, the surreptitious movement given away by his white glove, while the other hand hung motionless at his side. The chestnut, roused from some happy stable reverie, stirred as though to say "I beg your pardon?" Twitch-twitch, went the white glove on the rein. "That's not the tune *we* march to—heaps of time for a nap"; and the chestnut stood on three legs. Twitch-twitch, insisted the Prince. "Oh, well—" The little horse straightened, but its neck was too long, and its nose hung straight. . . . The Prince's right hand rose to the salute, the Colonel curvetted past with the colour-escort after him, the grandstands rose to the banner, the bands played—and the Prince's horse dreamed on, waking only to carry him stodgily off the Parade at the end.

It all seems a long time ago. Even longer, perhaps, to the rider of that bored little horse than to me.

Each year on August 4th there has been an annual casting up of accounts in the English newspapers. Each year it has grown grimmer, until in 1939 it reached the "NO WAR THIS YEAR" stage. Each year somebody was sure to quote Sir Edward Grey's famous words as he stood looking out from a high window above the Horse Guards Parade late on the night of August 4th, 1914: "All over Europe the lamps are going out, one by one—and we shall not see them lit again in our time." By 1939 one found oneself getting a little tired of poor old Grey, who never meant to be an annual nuisance with that remark. He had said so many better things. But there it was again. . . .

I dropped the paper with an annoyed sound, and put on a tweed skirt and a suède jacket and went out into a fine, foggy mizzle to meet Percy and the golden retriever Honey in Hyde Park on their morning walk. We did the Serpentine, and Honey had her swim after a stick. Then we drifted to a bench under a tree at the edge of Rotten Row and sat down. We were discussing the production of a play of mine called "Queen's Folly" which seemed on the point of getting somewhere at last. We were pretty happy. We were making plans. We were daring to look ahead. We *forgot* Hitler. It was like old times.

Suddenly through the heavy, misty air came the boom of a big gun. Our eyes met questioningly. It wasn't thunder. It came again. Honey, who hates noises, crowded in against Percy's legs and began to shake. It came again. Some sort of practice-firing at Knightsbridge barracks, we said stupidly, and tried to resume our talk. The gun continued to go off, at regular intervals. Honey shook harder and whimpered. We patted her, reasoned with her. She looked up piteously into our faces and begged us to stop the thing, whatever it was. We tried to explain to her that we didn't know what it was, and that we didn't like it either. We agreed with her that it was a very horrid noise. Much too late, we thought of counting. Finally it stopped. But somehow we were no longer so happy about "Queen's Folly." We got up soon, attached Honey to her lead, and started home rather silently across the wet grass.

The telephone rang as I was sitting down to luncheon in the flat. When I took down the receiver and said Hello I heard nothing but Percy's laughter—he was rocking.

"All right," I said bravely. "I'll buy it. What was going on?"

"The Queen's birthday!" he got out. "A forty-one gun salute for the Queen's birthday!"

The war of nerves, we decided, was getting Honey down.

The blackout rehearsal on August 10th was the most extensive experiment of its kind that had ever been attempted in Britain. It was not compulsory on the civilian population. And here again you encounter the essential quality of this law-abiding nation of cheerful individualists. "There is no intention to alarm . . . but we do desire to impress upon the public . . . most earnestly request the full co-operation . . ." were recurrent BBC phrases during the preceding days in all radio announcements connected with this first sighting-shot of the Air Ministry at national blackout. People were to be given an opportunity to show what they could do on their own. It was pointed out that negligence or incompetence would naturally entail more intensive measures in succeeding tests. "No bombs will be dropped, not even dummy ones," the BBC would add, with its inimitable deadpan humour.

From midnight until dawn (4 A.M.) the whole of southern England, which included twenty-eight counties, was to be in total darkness. The large corps of volunteer civilian Air Wardens were to be on duty, patrolling their beats to report to householders any stray leakage of light, and to record addresses of offenders. But it was made quite clear to them at their depots, where they gathered a little before midnight to receive final instructions, that they had no *actual authority* to force some unreasonable inhabitant to douse his lights. Their last recourse in the event of an argument was to summon the nearest policeman. But even the policeman was not entitled to treat refusal to darken prem-

ises as a *legal offense.* Is it any wonder that Britain was an utter riddle to the totalitarian mentality?

The training of the volunteer civilian Air Wardens (men or women equally acceptable) was regarded by the professional objectors as containing a lot of waste motion. There were lectures several times a week, which the Wardens attended or not as was convenient to them. There was a practice gas-van, which anyone wearing their own respirators could enter for the sake of experience. In the lectures competent men from the Home Office told what to do in certain given emergencies such as different forms of gas, incendiary bombs, high explosive bombs, etc. The Wardens would have well-defined duties to perform in given circumstances. They learned these in the lecture halls, and from a blackboard. They were taught, for instance, to recognize by fairly constant signs and reactions the difference between mustard gas, shall we say, and phosgene or lewisite. Then when they went out on an evening's drill, they were met by men called "producers" whose job it was to plant the "incident" with which they had to deal, and to test their knowledge then and there. "A bomb has just fallen in front of Number 5," the producer would say, "and a woman has run out of Number 7 screaming and beating the air. What kind of gas does that indicate?" Or: "An incendiary bomb has just landed in front of Number 15. The way in from Bayswater Road is blocked by débris. What is your procedure? And what is the shortest remaining route for the ambulance and fire-truck?" Or the instructions would be given them in an envelope, with an accompanying form to be filled in on the spot, which was checked over and graded before the next meeting at the hall. It was rather like a sombre sort of game. A certain mild rivalry was created between the sectors. A certain in-

formal social contact was established not unlike the old Toc H organization.

The Wardens themselves felt, in the face of some skepticism and chaffing, that sound and useful work was being done. Personally I could not see that it was any more futile than life-boat drill on a peace-time ocean liner, which most experienced travellers are too lazy to attend. But the same experienced travellers will make a mental note of their emergency station and the direction in which the arrow outside their stateroom is pointing. The Warden work went, of course, much deeper than anybody knew at that time. It was designed to provide a corps of trained, capable civilians who would have been through certain motions and mental processes which would come naturally to them again in case of actual need. It is still going on, more intensively, now that there is a real war. And it is still the best insurance against panic.

The lectures which I attended in August were given by a man who wore a monocle. It would be futile to try to describe him further. His idiom was that of the war which began in 1914. He spoke of "strafing"—bombers "dropped their eggs." He was very illuminating. He made and drove home such points as that an Air Warden's first duty was to preserve his own life—because dozens of people might die for lack of his presence at his post if he took a needless risk and became a casualty himself. No heroics, therefore, under fire. No impulses. Furthermore, it was not the Air Warden's duty to give orders to the other arms of his organization—which is to say, he would not demand a decontamination squad or an ambulance, he would merely *report* the presence of gas or a casualty and its location and the most direct route which still remained open. And so forth. Somebody

at the Home Office had done a lot of thinking before August, 1939.

One was entitled to anticipate a certain grimness about the night of the big blackout scheduled for August 10th—which had to be postponed till the 11th because of unfavourable weather conditions for the Air Force observations. Darkened streets, with planes and searchlights overhead, would certainly be reminiscent of dreadful times twenty years ago, if not a grisly foretaste of bad hours to come.

In Continental blackout rehearsals the entire population was required to go underground and stay there. Siren warnings and fire-gongs and all-clears and other sound effects lent verisimilitude. With what inconceivable annoyance and non-comprehension must those regimented communities have learned that the English, who are proverbially mad, gathered in crowds at Marble Arch and Piccadilly Circus and sang songs as the lights winked out! The tune they sang most was "The Chestnut Tree," but the impromptu words were "Join the British ARP!"

Do not make the mistake—I assure you it would be a mistake—of putting this behaviour down to national levity. It was all of a piece with the invisible girding up of loins with which the English face a really serious job of work. And it was more typical of the race than the temporary incredulous horror with which they faced the 1938 Crisis. This was the same nation whose Tommies twenty-five years before learned the German Hymn of Hate by ear and jubilantly sang it back at the bewildered enemy trenches.

All the Air Warden beats I was able to check up on were comparatively uneventful. In the West End good-natured crowds assisted the police and the Wardens to knock up houses which leaked light, to everyone's satisfaction; and a

lighted shop sign which seemed to somebody a direct challenge was unofficially smashed. By some fantastic oversight Paddington Station was found to be a blaze of light after the zero hour. A local policeman ambled purposefully in that direction. Paddington Station went suddenly very dark, and some absent-minded porter doubtless got a flea in his ear.

In a westward residential street there were two uncurtained windows with a lighted room behind, and a taxi ticking up in the street below. The Air Warden rang the bell. A blonde head, glamorous enough for Hollywood, came out one of the lighted windows.

"Oh, have I got too much light on?" it cried in pretty dismay.

"Much too much," said the Warden coldly.

"I'm *so* sorry, but I haven't got any dark curtains," she explained winsomely.

"Draw whatever curtains you have, please."

At this point a masculine voice was to be heard within the room. The head disappeared. The lights went out. The taxi went on ticking. Romance, 1939.

Not black enough, said the Air Ministry. "THE GREAT GREYOUT," cracked a columnist's headline. And there was the usual outcropping of letters to the newspapers from people who could have told them how to do it better, including criticism of its voluntary nature. But aside from some culpable oversights, and a couple of obstreperous cranks, civilian co-operation was whole-hearted and pretty effective. Cars with sidelights, buses, railway lights, pavement reflections—and the still undisguisable Thames—remained the chief problems.

There would be more blackouts soon, we were told, more

drastic ones, less like a Christmas pantomime. Authority would be tightened, penalties would be introduced.

I don't think anybody had any idea then how short the time for rehearsals was growing.

Days went by so normally. The King visited his Reserve Fleet in foul weather, and went out in his barge without a raincoat, grinning affectionately at the men, who knew they were no colder than he was. There was some talk of a railroad strike, some time the end of the month, but nobody expected it to come off, because in England strikes usually don't come off. (True, there had been a bus strike during Coronation Week, but that turned out to be something of a dud, because everybody said how nice it was to have them off the streets when things were so crowded anyway, and the roads were full of people who only wanted to stroll and look at the decorations. And when they came somewhat sheepishly back on duty, the conductors had to swallow more than a little chaffing and sauce from chars and other passengers who were regulars on the run. "We got along without you very well," was the burden of that.)

Emergency store-cupboard lists were published for housewives, including such items as tinned dog rations, 7 lbs. for 3/6, and "Black treacle, 1 lb., 5*s*."

The Siegfried Line was reported flooded out, and so word went round London that the new German best-seller was entitled "Mein Dampf."

"*No surrender!*" shrieked Forster at Danzig. And—"The Fuehrer will never stake German life lightly," said General von Brauschitsch, addressing an arms factory near Düsseldorf.

The Anglo-French mission was cordially received at Moscow, while Ribbentrop and Ciano met at the White Horse

Inn near Salzburg in the Tyrol—and we smiled a wistful smile for the summer of 1931 when "The White Horse Inn" was an operetta at the Coliseum, with enchanting music, and real yodelers, and a little steam-boat that moved across the stage and deposited a replica of the old Emperor Franz Josef at the pier so that with his assistance there could be a happy ending. Once Salzburg had meant music, and Mozart, and funny hats, and scenery. Now it became just another question-mark in the dreadful game of "What next?" Ribbentrop was said to be staying at a nearby castle whose rightful owner had been in the concentration camp at Dachau ever since the Anschluss. "THE AXIS WOBBLES" suggested one of the London headlines, and "DANSE SLIGHTLY MACABRE" was another. Italy was believed to desire peace above all things, but was fully alive to her nuisance value.

I went out one day and sat on a bench in the Gardens in the sun to write letters. Summer flowers bloomed all round me. Not far away there was the gleam of scarlet through the trees, and the gay, pattering music of a Gilbert and Sullivan score came down the breeze. Over at the bandstand the Coldstream Guards were giving an afternoon concert.

"Take heart, fair days will shine;
Take *any* heart—take mine!

Take heart, no danger glowers;
Take *any* heart—but ours!"

The notes of the flutes sparkled on the warm air. It costs tuppence for a chair inside the bandstand enclosure, but there is nothing to prevent you from listening on a free bench just outside the railing, or on the grass, which is usu-

ally damp. It is even possible to sail a boat on the Round Pond without missing the *diminuendos*. The applause after each number is punctilious, both from within and without the railing, and the conductor takes a bow.

I sat that day with an idle pencil and a blank page, because in the Wagnerian world we live in Sullivan's music seems so innocent and small that it always makes me want to cry.

The White Horse Inn conference adjourned to Berchtesgaden. Pictures of Burckhardt, the Swiss League High Commissioner for Danzig, appeared in all the papers—Hitler had once called him a tactful man—and it now seemed briefly that he might be the man who could save Europe. There were also pictures of Mr. Chamberlain (wearing an anti-midge veil) getting his salmon on the Laxford River in Sutherland. The cauldron bubbled. But a man may as well have a breather while he can.

August 15th came and went without its predicted crisis. "Peace is no longer in my hands," Hitler told Burckhardt grandly at Berchtesgaden. Motor traffic was practically at a standstill in Germany from the hoarding of petrol. On the 17th French war planes staged a practice raid over England —200 of them. Poland arrested 80 Nazis, and Burckhardt sent his wife and children out of Danzig. The German press campaign against Poland and England was in full swing—atrocities—encirclement—all the same old sickening stuff.

We realized, at the back of our minds, that Hitler was working himself out on a limb again, so that he could not climb down without loss of prestige. It was Danzig now in place of Czechoslovakia, but we realized that it was much worse than last year because another compromise like that

at Munich was impossible. We realized that this was the show-down. But somehow we went on having tea on the grass by the Serpentine—going to the cinema—eating dinners in Soho—casting plays—laying plans. We were deeply aware now that the issue was no longer just Danzig or just Poland. It was an issue which rose out of Germany's attitude towards her neighbours for the last seventy years. It could not be settled again by conferences, appeasement, and verbal gymnastics. It could not be postponed. The line had to be drawn, and it happened to have been drawn at Danzig. If Hitler could not take this in, there was going to be war. Now. Any day.

But this time we were as ready as it was possible to be. The past eleven months, full of dread and a still insistent hope in spite of preparation for the worst, had wrought a change which went as deep as the bone. It was no longer possible to go on existing from day to day for the next eleven months. We had had enough. Either the tooth stopped aching, or it came out.

Meanwhile, the sun shone over London, turning the balloons a pure, exquisite silver against blue sky. And we gave ourselves another week at least, till Hitler spoke at the Tannenberg celebration, commemorating the German victory over the Russians in 1914—or till the Nuremberg Congress in September.

On the 19th the Germany army occupied Slovakia, whose borders Hitler had recently guaranteed for twenty-five years, and began massing on Poland's southern and least fortified frontier. Poland, said the papers, remained calm. Poland, it developed later, remained much too calm much too long, and various mysterious hints began to be thrown out as to the reasons for so much self-possession, quite apart

from the undisputed valour of its population. Poland had already been urged more than once to prepare to shorten her salient frontier with Germany, 1,500 miles long, and had contrived not to hear. Poland even then appeared less able than the Allies had been the year before to believe that a European war could begin. Poland was not afraid of Hitler, like other sensible nations.

On Monday the 21st it became known that Germany and Russia had signed a trade pact, and that Mr. Chamberlain was returning to London sooner than expected. Tuesday was the day we got it below the belt.

On Tuesday morning I woke with the old familiar start, as the newspapers came through the letter-slot and landed plop on the rug. I sighed for sheer weariness, and got out of bed—Mrs. Richmond was not due for another hour—and went to see what they had thought up on the Continent over night. The papers had fallen butter side up, folded. The *Telegraph* headlines are outside now, and the *Express* has always had them there. I shall always retain a mental picture of myself as the headlines met my eyes that morning—clad in blue pyjamas, a plait swinging over each shoulder, bent double just inside the door with a hand reached down to pick up the papers—frozen there, immovable, staring at black type while my stomach went cold: "RIBBENTROP FLYING TO MOSCOW." "HITLER CLAIMS MOSCOW PACT."

We rallied slowly as the day went on. The Pact wasn't signed yet. After all, we had got to Moscow first. And the obvious drawbacks to any real co-operation between Russia and Germany leaped to the eye. For one thing it would drive a coach and horses through the Anti-Comintern Pact. Japan was furious at the mere idea, and Italy, after being just as startled as anybody, tried hastily to say that she

had known it all along, and then that it was Mussolini's idea in the first place. A French newspaper recovered quickly to inquire with Gallic *sangfroid* if this meant that Russia would henceforth adhere to the Anti-Comintern Pact.

It appeared also that the Soviet actually expected the Anglo-French conference at Moscow to continue. During the next forty-eight hours we searched for reassurance amid a steadily increasing series of ominous signs. Nothing more was heard of Burckhardt. For the first time in history the English Parliament was recalled by radio, to meet on Thursday. British subjects were advised to leave Poland. French subjects were advised to leave Berlin. The American Ambassador to London flew back from Cannes and Americans were advised to leave England. The King was returning to London from Balmoral. The rail engineers maintained that they still intended to strike on Saturday.

Blackout regulations were to be enforced at once. Street lighting was being reduced to 3-inch crosswise slits in the traffic signals, hooded hurricane lamps were hung on the street-refuge posts. Everywhere the kerbs were being banded with black and white paint. Blue bulbs replaced the white ones in the corridor lights of public buildings and apartment houses, in railway carriages, buses, etc.

My date-book is a blank at this point. I think that it was Wednesday afternoon that I went to the Zoo and watched the gibbons in their flying-cage, and had tea on the Members' balcony. The elephant who gives rides to children was indisposed and did not appear. I didn't feel so well myself. There was a complicated knot where my stomach should have been.

In May, 1935, Hitler had said: "We will sign non-aggression pacts with all the world, provided only that we

are treated fairly. We will not sign a multi-lateral pact of mutual assistance in the East, for in no circumstances would Germans fight for Bolshevists. In such a fight our nation simply would not march. Rather than sign such a pact I should hang myself." To which Comrade Stalin retorted in August of the same year: "The main aim of the Communist party is to bring about the union of all opposition forces and to overthrow the barbarous Nazi régime." And Hitler, in 1937: "Any treaty links between Germany and present day Bolshevist Russia would be without any value whatsoever."

On Thursday, August 23rd, 1939, the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed, and "Mein Kampf" became a scrap of paper along with the Anti-Comintern Pact.

"We should never forget that the regents of present-day Russia are blood-stained, low criminals: that here is the scum of humanity, which, favoured by conditions in a tragic hour, overran a great State, butchered and rotted out millions of its leading intellects with savage bloodthirstiness, and for nearly ten years has exercised the most frightful régime of tyranny of all time. Nor must we forget that these rulers belong to a nation which combines a rare mixture of bestial horror with an inconceivable gift of lying, and today more than ever believes itself called upon to impose its bloody oppression on the whole world. . . . But one does not conclude a treaty with some one whose sole interest is the destruction of his partner. Moreover, one does not make them with parties to whom no treaty would be sacred, since they inhabit this world not as the advocates of honour and truthfulness but as the advocates of lying, deceit, theft, rapine, and plundering."

That is not somebody writing about the Nazi régime today. It is the father of Nazi-ism writing about the Bolsheviks in 1924-6.

The speech at Tannenberg, to celebrate the German victory over Russia in 1914, was not unnaturally—in the circumstances—called off.

When I went down to my bank in Park Lane that morning a small crowd was gathered on the grass in Hyde Park to watch the unloading of ammunition for the anti-aircraft gun which lived in the open space behind the Dolphin Fountain and this side of the tea-house. Someone at the Bank remarked quietly that after all London was probably the safest place to be.

The Museums were closed for storing of their valuables. Cruises had been cancelled or diverted. Mr. Chamberlain, speaking to a crowded, silent House, said that we were "confronted with the imminent peril of war." The Russian envoy was conspicuously absent from the Diplomats' Gallery that day.

"Meanwhile," said the *Evening News*, "the new German-Soviet entente presents a baffling picture. We see Herr Ribbentrop, the arch enemy of Communism and the life and soul of the Anti-Comintern Pact, who once referred to Communism as 'the most terrible of all diseases,' presenting himself on the doorstep of a be-swastika'd Moscow while the German Embassy staff greets him with 'heils' and Nazi salutes and the Russian-in-the-street looks on in silent but respectful astonishment. Presently the pact is signed—Herr Ribbentrop's staff of 32 appears to have been superfluous—and the great Stalin himself is present to see the seal set on Communist-Nazi amity."

Supposedly even Communism was sweet to Ribbentrop compared to his virulent hatred of England, where in 1936 during his residence at the German Embassy he had been not-too-privately known as "Brick-en-drop" and allowed to feel himself the bounding boor he apparently strove to be. There is nothing Ribbentrop would not do—he has proved it—to try and get even with England, who actually had the effrontery to criticize when he entered the presence of the King with a stentorian "Heil Hitler!" and the Nazi salute, after which he seized and pumped the King's astonished hand. England, as a nation, may want Hitler's scalp. But Ribbentrop wants England's.

The non-aggression pact between Russia and Poland which was supposed to endure till 1945 stipulated that "should one of the contracting parties be attacked by a third State or a group of other States, the other contracting party undertakes not to give aid or assistance, either directly or indirectly, to the aggressor state during the whole period of the conflict." That, we thought, was useful and comforting, in spite of the apparent absence from the Nazi-Soviet Pact as signed of the usual "escape clause" which was always in Russian treaties.

Of course there was no escape clause. But it was another three weeks before the sublime knavery of Ribbentrop's deal at Moscow really dawned on us. It seemed impossible, in a world from which sanity and humanity had still not entirely departed, to anticipate the reptilian workings of the Nazi mind. It was a lesson we could not learn, a nightmare we had not got the mental equipment to dream; so that each time we were surprised, shatteringly surprised, all over again.

There was a drain on the shops for dark curtain material

and plain brown paper and glue—and for haversacks to carry gas-masks in. More balloons were being placed, in London. The Abbey was open again for the Intercession, but while London had by no means stopped praying, it was doing a lot of other things this year as well. Paris was ready to evacuate its civilians. There were still no signs of war preparations in Rome. Poland's awkward calm continued. They were too brave. But we were all still too blissfully ignorant of what could really happen at the savage will of one so-called man.

There was no doubt this time about what I meant to do. I was writing this book. I had come back to England to see the year round again to the anniversary of my 1938 sailing. Therefore I made no transatlantic telephone calls, paid no visits to steamship offices, listened to no advice. I had taken one precaution, and I stuck to it. I was booked home on the United States Line.

London, however, was quietly emptying again. Dorothy had been at Cheltenham for a month on a visit, and Pish (who has turned eighteen but will never be called Patricia) was there with her. Pam was with Percy and Honey in the London flat. I had never been to Cheltenham, and its atmosphere, which is akin to that of Bath, promised to appeal to me.

We decided on Thursday night that Percy would drive Pam and Honey and me down to Cheltenham on Saturday morning—"for a few days," we said euphemistically. I was to have a room at an hotel near by, and we would make a Sunday drive through the Cotswolds, and I could run down to Gloucester again by bus on Monday if I liked, or Tewkesbury, which I had not seen for ten years, or perhaps even Malvern, for old times' sake. We would make a holiday of

it—we would enjoy ourselves—while somehow they hammered it through Hitler's skull that England and France meant business this time, and no more fooling.

On Friday there were calling-up posters in the Paris streets, and the Louvre and Versailles and Chartres were closed as efforts for the protection of their treasures began. France too was in a different frame of mind from 1938. France too had rolled up her sleeves to do a dirty job as well as possible. Italy was calling up men for—September 3rd. Warsaw emerged a little from its spectacular calm to start digging trenches. The British Embassy in Berlin began to burn its papers, but German officials in the Wilhelmstrasse were betting twenty bottles of champagne to one that there would be no war. Germans greeted one another in the street with "Heil Moscow!" and a bewildered snicker. Der Fuehrer was a one! They didn't pretend to understand this latest move of his, but they were confident that whatever he wanted he would get it without a war.

Roosevelt was sending out his sonorous appeals in all directions, working desperately against time and space. The S.S. *Washington* sailed, packed to the gunwales. In London the trenches in the parks were being opened and made ready, and you were reminded to make sure about your gas-mask. (Mine had travelled back to England with me in my hat-box.) To those of us who had been in London in 1938 it was a sickeningly familiar experience, but with a difference. This time everybody had known for weeks and months what to do—and did it. There was no panicking or hysteria in 1938, but 1939 had a grim efficiency which almost amounted to a ghastly cheerfulness. They knew what was likely to come, and they were making ready for it.

The threatened rail-strike was—of course—called off.

People were warned not to go abroad for holidays. The British Air Force was known to be at full strength, with listening-posts, searchlight units, etc., on a 24-hour schedule. The Army's strength compared to 1914 was vastly greater, plus a Territorial Force of 300,000, and roughly 1,000,000 youths coming into training for the militia. Conical steel shelters were delivered at Buckingham Palace for the use of the sentries. The Balloon Corps were everywhere.

And—Hitler sent for Sir Nevile Henderson, the British Ambassador in Berlin. A few hours later, Henderson was reported to have emerged from that interview in a state of speechless indignation, and the international temperature rose perceptibly.

On Saturday, Hitler's patience was once more announced to be at an end—this time with Poland. The Nuremberg Congress was cancelled "because of transportation difficulties." The German people heard with perfectly straight faces that Poland, the big bully, was about to attack the Reich. German ships were called home, and German residents of England packed themselves tearfully into the Harwich-Flushing boat-trains. There were rumours of a sinister secret clause in the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Strasbourg was being emptied of all its civilians. Poland queued up for gas-masks and requisitioned vehicles, but deferred further mobilization because Henderson was flying home to London to report.

With that nightmarish feeling of having done all this before, I spent Friday evening packing country clothes and a week's necessaries into a couple of bags, putting everything else into the trunks except a hanging-cupboard full of clothes which could be shifted into the wardrobe-trunk in half an hour by Mrs. Richmond or anybody—in case I decided to

send for the rest of my luggage and not return to London before sailing; in case, we might as well say it, war was declared while I was at Cheltenham.

It was a warm, sunny morning, the 26th of August, and we took along a picnic lunch, with beer and thermos tea, to eat by the roadside. The car, which contained a lot of things Dorothy and Pish felt they couldn't do without any longer, had a slightly refugee aspect when we set out. Someone who calls himself my friend has said, most unjustly, that I travel in the Bernhardt manner, minus only the tiger on a lead. But my inevitable typewriter and book-box, plus the English climate which switches you from cotton frocks to woollies over night, do not make for simplicity in luggage. As it was, I had to choose between the gas-mask and the camera, and the gas-mask won, but I never ceased to regret the camera, especially as four film rolls got in anyway, taking up all that space.

Western Avenue, leading into Buckinghamshire and beyond, was not as full as I have seen it on many normal Saturdays. So much for any panic private evacuation of London. Passing through High Wycombe, I noticed that the long-suffering Red Lion had been furbished up anew, with rows of pea-green shutters—against red brick walls—and I tried to imagine the devastating phrase young Dizzy would have uttered if he had beheld it thus bedizened on his return from Egypt in 1824.

A little further on at Beaconsfield the black-and-white inn called the Saracen's Head was studded with flowering window-boxes; its inside has been "improved" to distraction, for the benefit of the film trade from the studios near by. Beyond the town we turned off the main road into a deep green lane, looking for a place to eat lunch—which we

did on a rug laid on the thick grass beside the road, and I upset the beer. We were quite merry while we ate, and only every now and then did the knowledge of why we were there, on our way into the country, strike a chill through the nonsense old friends can talk together, especially when assisted by a dog.

It is the thing nowadays to bypass Oxford. And a very good thing that you are able to if you only want to get to the other side of it, for the High was not designed for heavy motor traffic. But somehow while we ate lunch it had come out that I had never seen the Shelley Memorial at University College. There seemed to be no good reason for my doing without it any longer, and early in the afternoon we drew up in front of the entrance to University, which is level with the pavement in the High.

Like most of Oxford, the 17th-century building is of old brownish-grey stone. An ancient myth of University College claims Alfred the Great as its founder, and it celebrated its millenary—work it out, Harvard—in 1872. It *removed* to its present site about 1343. You pass through a narrow door and a dark entry. You may or may not encounter the porter in his little box on the left. If you do he will exchange with you an understanding smile when you indicate your wish to see the Memorial. He does not accompany you. He does not expect a fee. You are entirely free to emerge into the sunny quadrangle with its green turf and flowering window-boxes. You keep to the right, along the near wall, through another small door and another dark entry. . . .

Bathed in light from above, the white marble figure of a drowned naked boy lies half on its side in an attitude of childlike relaxation, as though washed up in the edge of the shallow marble wavelets. The head is thrown back, on

a strong young neck. The arms have drooped forward across his body, the fingers are pitifully curled, and the legs are a little bent at the knee. The pedestal is dull green marble. The walls which enclose him are lined with the simplest oak panelling. Whether you know or care anything about the restless, striving spirit of the poet, you cannot leave him there without a long backward look at his stillness and beauty and peace.

Beyond Oxford you are really on Cotswold, where the buildings are all of local stone, a lovely golden grey, and the miracle of dry-walling runs always beside the road. The sky, even on a sunny day, is piled high with magnificent clouds, whose shadows drift formless across the round green shoulders of the Hills. The sheep have small black faces, and the streams run brimful to a grassy edge without banks. On either side of the road the land will drop away to a dramatic long distance view of rolling green pasture, little rambling stone walls with jagged tops, and a grey village in a valley with a single church spire. Sometimes I think the sweetest colour in the world is the tender heaving yellow of a hillside field of mustard, inverted sunshine, against the grey underside of a dark cloudbank.

I was already familiar with the upper end of the Cotswold country, from Shipston-on-Stour to Stow-on-the-Wold. That belonged to the summers of 1936-7 when I lived in the Buckinghamshire cottage and took long drives looping out to the West. And now, as my eyes rested hungrily on the soft Cotswold landscape I was beset again by nostalgic pain—the old days, the dear days, not far behind as time goes, and not entirely innocent of tension themselves—the days before the Austrian Anschluss. When would we see their like again?

Abyssinia was still in the air, Italy had walked out of the League, Haile Selassie had gone into exile, and there was trouble with the Nazis in Danzig, when on a June day in 1936 we set out to find Compton Wynyates in Warwickshire. I was writing a book about a house—a house so lovely that each of its sons as he came of age took it to wife with a devotion no woman could even hope to share. Since the publication of that book I have had to confess over and over again, to the incredulity or sorrow of people who wrote me letters or people who sat next to me at dinners, that there is no house named Queen's Folly—that I cannot tell them the secret of its whereabouts because it does not exist, except as a composite of a dozen houses equally lovely in their way, tucked away in the Cotswold valleys. I have come to feel permanently apologetic about this. But take Compton Wynyates, which is one of the dozen. Take it now, with my love, and the day that went with it, only four years ago.

We stopped at Bicester for lunch that day, at the King's Arms; and then crossed the infant Cher by an enchanting bridge at Lower Heyford, where brown cattle stood knee-deep in the stream and white ducks left a busy wake. Half-grown rabbits appeared in the road ahead of the car, going all out; poppies were beginning to show scarlet in the fields; the first hay was being cut. At a lonely crossroads where the four winds of heaven met on the way to Chipping Norton there was a draggle-tail pub called, unforgettably, The Quiet Woman. At Chipping Norton, with its terraced High Street, red horse-chestnut petals lay thick on the ground. We came to the windy ridge where the Rollright Stones stand, sombre even in summer sunshine with the oppressive mystery of all megalithic remains, and we stopped the car and got out to look at them. There are supposed to be sixty

of them, but it is said you can never count them twice the same. It is said that on certain anniversaries the stones become men and join hands and dance. It is said that a little house near by is tenantless because the stones pass close to it each midnight when they go down the hill to drink in the stream at the bottom.

We took the wrong turning at Brailes and wandered awhile in leafy deserted lanes, and then came suddenly on the thing we were looking for. Compton Wynyates is a red brick house in a countryside of grey stone—the builder having apparently been at some pains to transplant his snobbish foreign materials along the hilly roads. Its setting is one of the most perfect in England—in a deep valley on a private lane which runs past it along the top of a tree-clad hill to a gate at the foot of the slope; hence Camden's reference to it as "Compton-in-the-Hole." The Sir William Compton who built it was a friend of Henry VIII and attended him to the Field of the Cloth of Gold. In 1512 he received "honourable augmentation of arms," which I cannot resist setting down here: "*a lion passant gardant or*" with the crest "*a demi-dragon crazed gules with a coronet of gold upon a torse argent and vert.*" (Which means: a golden lion walking, with its dexter, or right, forepaw raised and its face turned toward the spectator; the upper half of a dragon in crackled red with a gold coronet on a green and silver wreath.) Compton died in 1528 of the sweating sickness, "immensely rich, leaving property in eighteen counties." Fuller says of him: "He might have been, for wealth or honour, what he pleased; but contented himself with what he was." His great-grandson was made Earl of Northampton by James I, and Compton Wynyates has been in the family ever since. They became Marquesses in 1812. The

present owner allows the house to be shown on certain days of the week, and the garden, with its magnificent topiary work, is always open to visitors. Unlike Hatfield, which was somewhat Victorianized, the interior of Compton Wynyates has been kept so thoroughly period as to seem a little bleak. But no house in England can rival the beauty and perfection of its exterior. There is even a bit of the moat left, for the accommodation of whole families of swans, and the water's edge is spangled with pink rose petals.

We fetched up at the George at Shipston for tea—a tidy bow-fronted 18th-century inn where they give you a colossal country tea, served on a low table in the brown leather lounge which adjoins the bar; tea with nine (count them) kinds of cakes and a glass bowl of strawberries. We were encouraged to gorge by a fat white-clad cook who apparently took one look at us and decided we had been underfed for years. While we ate, the local bar-flies gathered to wait for opening time, and the Cotswold talk was rich and rare and full of abstruse humour.

Beyond Shipston the road dips down sharply into exquisite Ebrington, home of the "Yabberton yawnies" (simpletons) which Massingham has written of. The upside-down logic of this cherished tribe has grown into a local mythology which goes round the pubs of an evening. I like best the story of the farmer who went out to sow his field and forgot to open the shutter of the drill so that no seed fell—and comforted himself when he discovered it with the remark that anyway it would "stop they crows from pickin' uv 'em up."

At Chipping Campden we paused to go into the lovely golden stone church, and a man who was scrubbing down a tombstone in the churchyard with soap and water warned us firmly that the service wasn't over. We drew up again to

photograph the manor house at Bretforton in the long, late light, and dined at the Lygon Arms at Broadway, which is a thing we swore never, never to do again because it was such an irritating place. Dine at the Talbot at Stow-on-the-Wold and you will be served by the most charming waiter on Cotswold; or at the White Hart at Buckingham where the parents who have been to see their boys at Stowe school return to feed; or at the Whateley Hall at Banbury, and walk in the garden while you digest; or at Winchcombe, most of which stands at an angle of forty-five degrees; or at Aylesbury, where there is a statue of Disraeli in the market-square; or at Moreton-in-the-Marsh. But always drive through Broadway as fast as the law allows, in order to retain a pleasant impression.

✦

The Cotswolds were showing off, as we travelled towards Cheltenham in August, 1939. The delicious, slow eastern rise was sunny and warm. On the bleakest heights somewhere beyond Burford we had a pouring rain and a thunderstorm. By the time we reached Cheltenham the sun was shining again through big cottonwool clouds in a sky of ineffable blue.

It had grown upon my notice before I left London how the campaign of hatred from over the water, the sowing of suspicion there even among members of a family, the apotheosis of personal brutality, had fostered as its opposite number in England only an ever-increasing kindliness and smiling good-will towards each other and anyone capable of responding in kind. At Cheltenham I was cordially received into a family circle already enlarged to bursting point. No slightest indication that I was, after all, a stranger to most

of them and an alien, even though a friendly one, came from the eldest (87) to the youngest (10). The welcome was the more engaging as I was decidedly not a distressed refugee in need of shelter. My comfortable hotel room near by was already secured and I was quite prepared to go to it and be out of their way. But no. I must have tea. I must be made to feel that house and family were my own. And our conversation over the clink of china and silver in that crowded little drawing-room was serene and cheerful and had very little to do with why we were all there. "One day we will thank Hitler for this tea-party," was what it came to. And we said how annoyed he would be if he knew how we were enjoying ourselves, all because of him and the need to quit London for a time.

Cheltenham is a Georgian town of square stone houses with stout columns, or flat-faced terraces with high filigree balconies of exquisite ironwork. It was full of Virginia creeper, and window-boxes with red geraniums and white daisies, or pink geraniums and blue lobelia. Even its lamp-posts on the Promenade were garlanded with hanging-baskets full of blooming plants and the triple row of ancient chestnut trees met overhead in vast arches of green. There is a Neptune Fountain, and the cinema, though new, is in the stately Georgian style, and does not intrude its façade on the eye.

My small first-floor room at the hotel looked out on the broad, tree-shadowed street from behind an ironwork balcony. The manageress assured me that it would not be noisy even though it faced the street. During the first morning all that passed by was a two-wheeled milk-cart drawn by a pony, the driver standing up behind among the cans—a couple of girls on bicycles, and a couple of family cars.

It was a Sunday morning, of course—the 27th of August. The papers were full of what they themselves acknowledged to be rumours, from the immediate surrender of Danzig to another peace move by Mussolini. The Home Fleet was known to be at its post in the North Sea, ready to impose an immediate blockade. Evacuation rehearsals were announced for all the schools on Monday, cutting short the holidays of teachers and pupils—"Continuous ringing of the school bells any day or at any time will mean 'Come to school at once with your pack and gas-mask.' " Somehow those few simple words were as chilling as any I read that Sunday.

400,000 of the little backyard steel shelters had been issued in London, and more were on the way. Hop-pickers off for their annual fête in Kent were warned to take along their gas-masks. "CLIMAX" said the *Observer*, where "THE CRISIS" had appeared a year ago, and the article by Garvin which followed finished thus: "Writing against the clock, we look up at the impassive dial which ticks out the pace of human destinies and knows neither elation nor fear. The world's issue is on the knife-edge and tonight may decide."

Garvin was wrong. There was another week to go.

Sir Nevile Henderson had arrived at Croydon on Saturday noon. His last interview with Hitler had been a monologue of abuse by the German Chancellor. The German view was that Britain, having lost all hope of the Russian alliance, must now abandon Poland to her fate, leaving Germany a free hand there, and presto! the peace of Europe was thus instantly preserved! But unlike Czechoslovakia, Poland had a direct pledge from both England and France. And when Henderson made it understood in no uncertain terms that the Nazi-Soviet Pact would in no way affect England's obli-

gations to Poland it was kept from the German people by the still incredulous German Government.

A tidy little cartoon appeared just now which showed an astonished-looking Nazi in a military cap and monocle saying to an indignant-looking Nazi bureaucrat: "But surely the English wouldn't be so deceitful as to mean what they say!"

Instead of the "escape clause" permitting Russia to at least stand aside in the event of a German-Polish conflict, Article 4 of the Nazi-Soviet Pact provided that neither of the contracting Powers would "join any other group of Powers which directly or indirectly is directed against one of the two"—thus eliminating Russia from the Peace Front. No answer was ever given by Russia to the British Government's inquiry about the meaning of this departure from any and all international morality.

On that August Sunday, everybody in Britain went for the customary drive and used all the petrol they pleased, with no advance in price. There had been no petrol on sale in Germany for days, and the price had nearly doubled everywhere else on the Continent. The English still motored at will through their delicious countryside and looked with loving eyes at its late summer splendour.

The glass in Canterbury Cathedral was being removed to safety, and armed guards had appeared at bridgeheads all over England.

The Marmont family, who in the last analysis can stand simply for Mr. and Mrs. England in these days of national travail, came for me in their car early in the afternoon. I was put in front, with Honey at my feet and Percy at the wheel. Dorothy and the two girls were in the tonneau. There was no false cheerfulness nor enforced reticence among us. Nothing had happened yet. It probably wasn't going to rain. We

enjoyed being together. We were going to drive out somewhere for tea, and somewhere else for dinner, and have a good time. It was not necessary to ignore the morning papers. We discussed them, found we had noted the same things, and had reached the same conclusions. We discussed them, yes—and then without conscious effort we closed a mental door on them, and as the Cotswold panorama unrolled before us, we discussed nicer things. This afternoon was ours, and it was beautiful. We were grateful for it. I cannot explain the singular absence of tension, amounting not quite to lightheartedness, not quite to fatalism, any other way.

A few miles outside Cheltenham on the way to Cirencester is a place called Seven Springs which is one of the several alleged sources of the Thames. There is no hullabaloo about it. You leave the car at the side of the road and squeeze through or climb over a vague wooden fence not worthy of the name, slide down a steep grassy bank beside the patch of smooth and slippery earth worn bare by your predecessors, and there, bubbling out of a low rock wall is a stream of clear cold water which lies in a shimmering pool over a brown rock bottom; and which then slips away through dark, deep foliage to join other streams which eventually flow united beneath London Bridge. At the border of the pool is a ledge of limestone rock with the print of fossil cockle shells. We contemplated the spot with affection and respect—good old Thames—and turned away to scramble back up the bank. Honey, for whom nothing is too good, paused to drink from the source, her golden forepaws planted in the clear, brownish water.

It appears to be no longer the fashion to say Cisseter for Cirencester, whose four lovely syllables are now given full value, with a long *i*. In Roman times it was the second largest

town in England, at an important crossroads on the Fosse Way. Nowadays, with its ancient wool-trade a thing of the past, it is a quiet Cotswold village with a broad street and a church which is really a miniature cathedral, possessing wall-paintings, pre-Reformation wood-carving, exquisite fan vaulting, rare old glass, and a magnificent porch. The bells used to chime the 113th Psalm every hour—"*Praise ye the Lord. Praise, O ye servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord. . . . From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the Lord's name is to be praised. . . .*"—every hour, all day and all night; which led Le Gallienne to remark in 1900 that he had never been kept awake so beautifully in his life. The Psalm is now chimed only every third hour.

As we drove out of Cirencester a long line of grey RAF trucks roared past us, one by one, towards London. Was it our imagination that they seemed to travel hurriedly, as though on an emergency call? It was.

Bibury is a famous beauty spot, alleged to be spoilt by trippers. Certainly its inn has added a tea-garden, which on a Sunday afternoon was crowded with people—and with wasps, who come for the jam. But Bibury is still beautiful anyway. We had our tea at a big table inside the inn, and Honey, who has got to the age when she has to be careful of her figure, cadged tea-cake behind Percy's back from the guilty-looking young man at the next table. When she was discovered he apologized, and we all smiled broadly at him and said No, not at all, if only she wasn't being a nuisance. . . . It was a day when if a shy young man on his Sunday holiday in cheap grey flannels and no necktie wanted to feed and demoralize your dog he might do it and welcome.

After tea in warm, late sunshine we walked along beside

the stream which flows parallel to the road which runs through the village—passing *between* the inn and its tea-garden—and crossed it by one of several little bridges to the famous row of cottages so much photographed for sepia post-cards. Arlington Row, Bibury, is even more charming than its pictures, with its bright flowers, grey Cotswold stone, and moss-grown slate roofs. For years I had been familiar with its image. When I finally arrived to stand on the thick, uneven grass above it, I was one of a group of silent, un-self-conscious, grave-faced Sunday trippers, a dozen or more of us—listening to the six o'clock BBC news bulletin from a radio which came through the open window of a cottage at the end. The old man who lived there had obligingly turned it up to carry through the window and himself sat outside on his low stone wall amongst us, listening. There was something about taxi-cabs in Paris—a shortage because of petrol regulations—last time French troops had gone to the battle of the Marne in taxi-cabs from Paris. . . .

One by one, or in twos and threes, we turned away from the sane, non-committal tones of the BBC—turned away down the tree-bordered path that follows the water—there was a gigantic black slug in the middle of the path—there were brown trout in the stream—Honey wanted to swim and was firmly forbidden—the sun was warm on our faces, the grass was so green—the cottage gardens were packed with bloom—the world was so quiet here, so safe and ripe and still, and full of summer. . . .

And beyond the Rhine, the everlasting tramp of marching feet.

We spent five minutes or so spotting trout in the stream, throwing in a pebble now and then to stir them. The water was clear and cold-looking, with a lovely grass-and-gravel

bottom, and occasional fat green islands of cress. So far as I could tell our voices did not alter, but Percy's face as we went back to the car had gone a little rigid, and mine felt the same.

We drove on, as planned, to Bibury Court, where it is possible to walk down a little lane from where you leave the car, and behold the somewhat severe Jacobean façade of the house from a distance across a deep ditch and a broad green lawn. It is not trespassing, for nobody minds or makes any effort to prevent you. The stream, wider now, and brimful, slides down beneath overhanging trees at the edge of the lawn, over a weir with a perpetual cool and comfortable sound, and under a bridge where you can stand and admire the trout as long as you please.

The evening turned damp and showery. We drove along the Cotswold lanes, through the lovely "hideling villages" of the Hills, where the country folk were coming out of their little grey churches after evening service and separating quietly to go to their cottage homes. We dined at an inn near Amberley, after having sherries in the lounge with the local organist, a friendly soul in golfing clothes, who knew Percy; and returned to Cheltenham in time for the nine o'clock news broadcast.

It told us very little.

Except for the evacuation rehearsal, Monday's contribution to the news was small. The Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland were all increasing their mobilization, and yet the papers for Monday reported the tension mysteriously "eased." Danzig was prepared and tense—tenser than Warsaw, where there were few uniforms in the streets, and the Mayor himself, already becoming an heroic figure, was cheerily helping to dig trenches. And if Warsaw, whose num-

ber was up if anyone's was, still remained what the papers called "easy," it can be seen what an obstinately confiding world it was with which Hitler was playing ball; a world many times bitten, more than a little shy, but still constitutionally unable to anticipate in its blackest forebodings the extent of the devastation one man had the power and the will to loose upon it.

Hitler, of course, "rejected" all proposals, demanded Danzig and the Corridor outright, and announced with a gesture that he was prepared to face the consequences of war. A columnist's note from Paris, where the reservists' trains were leaving every half hour from the Gare de l'Est, commented on the difference between 1914 and 1939. Over the departure platform was a large picture of the scene twenty-five years ago, with hysterical women and children clinging to the soldiers. Today, it was pointed out, there was no hysteria, false gaiety, or war theatrics. "The French soldier embraces his womenfolk good-bye with a matter-of-fact control, and goes to his compartment with an air of resigned irritation." It was a most significant change. If war came now to France and England, it found two nations of united realists, determined in cold blood and under no false stimulus to put an end at last, once and for all, to the alarums and excursions which had destroyed peace of mind and economic security alike for a period of over five years.

There was no hysteria, either, in the school-treat atmosphere which pervaded the evacuation rehearsals. A few small brothers and sisters got confused and tired and wept. Tears stood in the eyes of the mothers, certainly. But most of the children regarded the prospect of a journey into the country as sheer adventure, and some of them seemed to feel that Hitler was giving them a picnic. Most of the mothers had

vied with each other to turn the children out well, and some new clothes were noticeable. Pillow cases, cheap attaché bags, and sometimes dad's old kit-bag from the last war, carried mackintoshes and a change of clothing.

No child and no teacher knew where he or she would go when and if the evacuation order was given. Each school had a number, and had been notified at which railway station they were to assemble, and what time they must be there, if the order came. The children were to be mustered in small groups, to keep the relatives and friends together, and they would be taken by the teachers and the voluntary helpers to their trains and coaches and would then leave for their unknown destination.

The Monday rehearsal began at 7 A.M. in some schools, and by a little after 9 A.M. all the children were ready, each with luggage, gas-mask, food for one day, and a label round the neck. There were no lessons, but the children remained at school till afternoon, playing games and doing marching exercises. The whole procedure was orderly and cheerful beyond all expectation. "If there is any uncertainty still about the war of diplomacy," commented the New York *Herald Tribune* at this time, "there can be none about the war of nerves. It is not Hitler who has won it."

As in 1938, there was very little sensationalism or scaremongering in the British Press, and no radio-commentator technique on the BBC, which continued to read its bulletins in the usual way, with weather forecast, SOS and police notices, and market quotations. The newspaper headlines were intrinsically alarming, but the tone of the material which followed was in an essential spirit of unhurried, unflurried preparation for the worst—in spite of an abiding hope that it would all prove somehow to be unnecessary; now a hope

based entirely on the embattled belief that surely, at the last minute, *something* would save Germany, as well as the democracies, from the ultimate horror of war; that there was nothing calling itself a man which would dare to force the world into war again; that there must be something going on we didn't know about, which would prevent him from taking the last fatal step—something that would crack somewhere behind him and bring him to reason.

At the same time there was no longer any doubt that the crack had to come in Germany now, and not in England and France. We were going through with it this time—if we had to. Our course was set. But—the average Englishman was still congenitally unable to believe his eyes and ears and his past bitter experience with the Nazi mentality. *Surely* Hitler would realize in time . . .

"No pressure of any sort," said the evening papers, "no kind of persuasion has been or will be exercised by the British Government to induce Poland to modify her attitude, and there is no question in the mind of any responsible person in this country about Polish rights and interests being ignored or passed over."

Illustrative of the restraint of the Press during these anxious days is the official use of the subjunctive mode in the following item, which enlivened all the Monday papers:

"AIR RAID WARNINGS.—The first thing you would hear would be the sirens, a high-pitched, wailing note, going up and down, up and down. This would probably be followed by the blowing of police whistles.

"If any gas-bombs have been dropped the Wardens will warn you with hand rattles. The all-clear for gas will be given by the ringing of hand-bells.

"The general all-clear, meaning that the raiders have passed, would be given by the sirens, a high steady note, without oscillations. During a raid, no one ought to be in the streets, except the ARP patrols and other civilian defence services."

On Tuesday the Mediterranean and Baltic were closed to British shipping. The *Europa* omitted to call at Southampton and Cherbourg, taking with her to Bremen passengers who wished to land, and stranding at Southampton passengers who wished to go on board.

A small crowd saw Sir Nevile Henderson off from Heston Airport on Tuesday, to carry the British Government's reply to Hitler. In response to the good wishes of the reporters, he said with an ominous smile, "I shall want all the luck I can get."

All over Europe air lines were being suspended and frontiers closed. German women fainted in the waiting crowds outside the Chancellery in Berlin. Mussolini was said to be moving heaven and earth in last minute peace efforts. "STILL HOPE OF PEACE AS ZERO HOUR NEARS," insisted the *Express*.

This was last year's cue for the flight to Berchtesgaden. But Chamberlain had long since shot his last bolt for peace, as had Mussolini also. This time there would be no "debate at the barricades."

Funny stories and legendary wise-cracks multiplied as the situation worsened. There was the railway guard who was reported somewhat as follows: "If 'e gets the Corridor, then 'e'll want the 'ole b—y train, and the next thing 'e'll be yellin' for is Clapham Junction! 'E 'asn't 'arf a cheek!"

And there was the bus conductor on the Special sent to transport a covey of nurses, and he clipped an arm round a

trim waist either side and crowed: "Look wot 'Itler done fer me!"

The newspaper sellers outdid one another. "Latest—latest—'Itler sends for a couple of aspirins. Official!" And—" 'Ere you are, best laugh for a penny! 'Itler's new speech in full!"

It is an even more personal war than the one they waged against the Kaiser.

Britons hurrying home from Germany were unanimous that the German people were completely incredulous of any possibility of war with England and France, believing blindly that they would get Danzig without firing a shot, or at worst after an easy campaign against Poland which would be over in a fortnight.

On Tuesday I set out by bus with Pish and Pam for Gloucester. It was the mildest sort of an excursion. We planned to go into the cathedral, and to have tea at the New Inn and be back for the six o'clock news bulletin. And it was in a way a rather sentimental journey for me, as I hadn't seen Gloucester since 1930, when the world was young and our hearts were light, and in Germany Hindenburg was still alive and Bruening was Chancellor, and there was a crazy little man named Hitler who was something of a joke, in Germany.

It was a strange sensation to come again to the end of the narrow passage which leads off the busy Westgate and blossoms suddenly into the spreading beauty of the Close with its trees and old, dreaming brick houses. And just as we arrived there a single bell began to toll. From where we stood —for it stopped us in our tracks—we could see the ringer through a small side door which stood open. My first thought was that it must be a "passing bell" for someone dead—then

I remembered reading somewhere of a "muffled peal" for general calamity, and a peal rung backward for general alarm. But this wasn't a peal, it wasn't muffled, and a single bell could not be rung backward.

Down across the Close in the afternoon sunshine came the Bishop in his white robes and scarlet hood, alone. He walked with the short, hurried steps of the very old, his hands clasped inside his sleeves in front of him. It was the bell for Evensong.

When the service was over we stood at the end of the nave and watched the Bishop come towards us on his way home, alone. He was unbelievably old and sad and wise in the sorrows of the world. His faded eyes as they rested momentarily on our faces were not unseeing, but they were past caring. He went on, with his short, hurried steps, out into the sunlight of the Close.

The nave of Gloucester Cathedral has massive round Norman columns, and in the south transept the Perpendicular style is said to have been born. There is an unabashed housemaid's-cupboard in the reliquary, in full view, a homely touch for any cathedral; there is a place for everything and everything is in its place, with a neat printed sign above the space allotted to it—Cleaning Powder, Sponges, Brushes, Dishes, Turpentine, and a Johnson's Wax outfit in its bag. Edward II, who was hideously murdered at Berkeley Castle near by, has a beautiful Gothic tomb which became a place of pilgrimage during the reign of Edward III. And there is a wooden effigy of Duke Robert of Normandy, eldest of the Conqueror's stormy brood, the one who never reigned in England.

The New Inn, in the Northgate near the Cross, is one of

the few remaining inns with a galleried courtyard; it was new in 1450, having been built for the accommodation of the pilgrims. We had tea there in the brown leather lounge—a delicious, imperturbable tea with hot buttered toast, but the room itself was empty and a little bleak. And then we took the bus home to Cheltenham, only fifteen miles away, past the camouflaged factory where the small Gloucester Gladiator planes are built.

On Wednesday the House assembled to hear Mr. Chamberlain say quietly that there was little change in the situation since the session of last Thursday. "Catastrophe, as I said then, is not yet upon us, but I cannot say the danger has yet in any way receded." He replied to a deputation desiring immediate evacuation of women and children that he considered such a move inexpedient so far; also that it might be construed abroad as pure nervousness. It can hereby be seen that the enormous expense and dislocation of the evacuation was not a thing which the Government rushed into headlong in any sudden panic.

Rome had its first blackout test, and Mussolini had been on the phone to Hitler. Henderson wired back in code a nine-page reply from Hitler, which was received after a lapse of nearly twenty hours. There seemed some grounds for hope that Hitler was hesitating at last. Russia was moving troops to the west. Meat and soap were unobtainable in Berlin.

Wednesday's funny story was about the Covent Garden porter who arrived at his favourite pub very hot and tired and fed up, and silenced the lugubrious opinions of his mates by a domineering " 'Itler, 'Itler, 'oo is 'e? Gimme a pint."

Paris was evacuating its school children.

Thursday morning's papers announced mobilization in Poland. France had taken over the radio and the railways. The tenants of London flats were digging trenches and filling sand-bags. In both France and England the police came out in blue steel helmets and khaki gas-mask carriers. All Hyde Park was being dug up, it seemed, for sand-bags. Twenty-eight Indian Princes had sent their messages of loyalty and service to the King-Emperor; headed as before by Bikanir and the Nizam of Hyderabad, who has his own army of over 18,000 men, and the young Maharajah of Jaipur, famous for his polo, trained at the Royal Military College at Woolwich and attached for a time as an officer to the Life Guards. 2,400 passengers had departed for America, sleeping on cots in the bars and swimming-pools of overcrowded liners.

On Thursday we first heard about the nice old lady in the bus who did wish that Hitler would marry and settle down.

There was only one place in Cheltenham where you could buy the London evening papers. That was from a woman who had a pitch on the Post Office steps in the Promenade. Each evening before dinner I walked down there to buy my *News* and *Standard*, in addition to the local sheet which was delivered to the hotel.

Each evening the same dozen or so people who felt the way I did about the London papers waited about for them to arrive, most of us alone, few of us attempting to make conversation. Sometimes the tops of the trees were flecked with late yellow sunlight. Sometimes a few drops of rain fell and umbrellas went up. But each night the small vigil was kept.

On Thursday evening there were men laying sand-bags round the Post Office and the Police Station—way down in

Gloucestershire, sand-bags. Thursday evening the headlines read:

"GOVERNMENT ORDER EVACUATION IN ALL AREAS TO BEGIN TOMORROW: PURELY AS A PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE"

And immediately below, in type almost as large:

"'IT DOES NOT MEAN WAR IS INEVITABLE'"

Friday morning's papers spoke of Hitler's "offer" to Poland, which he considered had been rejected. The whole thing seemed to be marking time in a way one could only endure as patiently as possible. The first batch of evacuees arrived by bus at the Town Hall, just across the way from my hotel; and almost before we became aware of them they had been assimilated into the landscape without a trace. Before lunch I went up to the library to change a book, and met the noon contents-bills:

"WAR BEGINS IN POLAND"

It seemed then as though one's stomach turned clean over with a sort of crunching sound.

I bought the paper, one of the local ones. I stood still to read it in the shady Promenade, among a lot of other transfixed people. Warsaw had been bombed early that morning, and civilians had been killed in many other Polish towns.

There had been no German ultimatum, no declaration of war, no warning at all—and apparently no listening-posts on the borders of Poland. This is an oversight for which I have yet to hear a satisfactory explanation. They knew they were next. But from all accounts, on that Friday morning

Poland slept until the bombs began to fall. The Polish ambassador was still at his post in Berlin. The Nazi ambassador was still in Warsaw—and a nasty shock he must have had that morning, I hope.

I find I can't remember much about Saturday. It was a dull, showery day, but the hotel garden was ablaze with flowers, and deck-chairs stood about on the lawn. France and Britain had sent what amounted to an ultimatum to Hitler, but there was no mention of a time limit. Withdraw at once from Poland, it said, or we go to war. So far there was no reply, and no mention of it in the German Press, and Germans were being emphatically reminded of the ban against listening to foreign radio broadcasts. Nobody in England really believed now that Hitler could or would withdraw. General mobilization was going forward in both France and England, the blackout was in force, the German Embassy in Carlton House Terrace, though still without orders, was burning its papers. The Buckingham Palace guard came on duty in full war-kit. The second day of evacuation in Britain was proceeding in an orderly fashion. Oh, yes—there was a full moon.

Percy, with his opposite number on duty at the London warden-post, arrived for a short week-end. On Saturday night it poured and sozzled with rain. Sunday morning was again a blaze of sunshine, and the garden was wet and shining and full of bloom.

"HITLER BOMBS THE BABIES" was the headline above a brief account of the bombing and machine-gunning of Polish evacuation trains full of women and children. The third day of evacuation in Britain was proceeding in an orderly fashion. By Monday three million helpless non-combatants—children, expectant mothers, the aged, the crippled, and the

blind—would have been moved to some place of comparative safety. Cheltenham had received 2,400 more on Saturday, from the crowded Birmingham area.

Germany pointed out on Sunday that she had not declared war on Poland. Italy proposed a five-power conference, including Poland. The German Embassy in London had still received no instructions from Berlin, but its luggage stood ready in the hall. Discontent in Germany was said to be mounting, but we reminded ourselves and each other not to count too much on that sort of thing—yet. German ammunition from the Skoda factories, which were in what had been Czechoslovakia, was said to be defective from sabotage; only a small proportion of the bombs went off. But German air attacks on Polish cities were increasing in fury, and the civilian casualty lists were growing. Hospitals, orphanages, and evacuation trains were receiving special attention. Teschen had been taken over by German troops after much bloodshed—the same Teschen which only eleven months before had been snatched from dismembered Czechoslovakia by the Poles, without much bloodshed. But presumably Poland saw things differently these days, and presumably it was not good form to recall embarrassing facts about 1938 now that her own martyrdom was at hand.

The BBC programmes were reduced to one wavelength, with almost hourly announcements. At the time the Sunday morning papers had gone to press there had been no reply from Germany to the British ultimatum, and there was still no mention of a time limit. On Sunday I had not yet acquired a radio in my room at the hotel. But when the Marmonts arrived a little after ten-thirty, it had somehow seeped into everybody's consciousness via earlier broadcasts that at

eleven o'clock Mr. Chamberlain would speak and—we would know.

We knew already, I think. We sat in deck-chairs in the garden in the sun. And from there, by the miracle of radio, we heard through an open window in the hotel smoking-room the voice of the Prime Minister in Downing Street. ". . . It is the evil things that we shall be fighting against—brute force, bad faith, injustice, oppression and persecution—and against them I am certain that the right will prevail. . . ."

✦

When the first Sunday Special Edition appeared in the Cheltenham streets, I was at lunch alone at my table beside a full length sash window in the sunny ground-floor dining-room of the hotel. The men who sold the papers did no shouting of the news. They simply filtered through the quiet streets with bundles under their arms and the contents-bills worn as an apron. There were three words only: "BRITAIN AT WAR." Trade was not brisk. There was little to add, at least not yet, to what we already knew.

At five o'clock the same afternoon France declared that a state of war existed with Germany. She had presented her ultimatum at midday.

So the war of nerves had proved to be Hitler's first failure, for the Allies had sat it out and forced his hand at last. Everybody mentioned with satisfaction how *very* surprised he must be.

It had come at last, the day that everybody had dreaded so long. And after the past eleven months it had come with no sense of shock. We told him so. All right, now let him learn, the only way he could learn anything, by blood and

iron and the tears of innocent victims, that the thing he was doing had got to stop. And of all the words there were for him, the one that seemed to dominate was perhaps not quite the sort of word you might expect. He was cursed a-plenty, and he was called names—but over and over that one other word cropped out, summing them all up and outweighing them—the word *stupid*. It was such a stupid thing to insist on war. Blind, brutal, beastly, barbarous, yes—but dear God, how *stupid!*

Percy left by car before tea, to return to his warden-post in London. At that time there was little doubt in anybody's mind, from Whitehall down, that the German bombing raids over England would begin before morning.

9. *The Lamps of Europe . . .*

I HAVE scratched out many false starts to this chapter, in which I hoped to set down something of what life was like at Cheltenham Spa during the first weeks of what will be known in English History as the Second German War. Each time my pencil has fumbled and slowed down—and doggedly begun again. I will try once more.

For to me that month of September, 1939, is a thing too precious to keep to myself. I am the richer for it, and it lies warm round my heart even now. At the risk of sounding over-sentimental or under-disciplined, I am determined to share it. If I fail, at least I made the effort.

But first you must scale down to it—a minute cross-section of a nation at war, a mere drop of ocean water on a microscope slide. There were no great deeds, no bursting of bombs, no heroic thrills—not even so much as the heart-stopping air-raid false alarm which London had on that Sunday morning within a few minutes of the declaration.

We heard about that later.

"It was not drama," said "Atticus" in next Sunday's *Times*. "It was sheer, lurid melodrama. The Lyceum never thought of anything like it. It seemed as if Hitler was going to reply to our declaration of war, not in 5,000 words but

5,000 aeroplanes. A sneaking admiration for German thoroughness crept disloyally into my consciousness.

"I drove to Westminster past hundreds of air-raid Wardens who beckoned me to shelter like the young gentleman in 'Excelsior.' With a surprising disregard of all instructions, the House was packed at 12 noon, the entire Cabinet was on the Front Bench like so many sitting birds, and the lugubrious sirens continued to orchestrate the proceedings from without."

An Air Warden who was on duty at his post in Bayswater at the time said that the pit of his stomach went cold and he thought: "They couldn't even wait till the words were out of Chamberlain's mouth!" Photographs in the newspapers of the crowds which sought shelter in the trenches in the parks showed unhurried, often smiling people, many of them hatless in the warm sunshine. It had come, and they could take it. But it proved to be neutral planes flying in, and the all-clear was sounded about twenty minutes later.

A Foreign Office official was said to have been in the act of handing the German Chargé d'Affaires his passports and arranging for the safe conduct of the German Embassy staff in Carlton House Terrace when the warning sounded. Neither of them took the slightest notice, the interview proceeded without a pause, and ended just as the all-clear came, with no reference to the alarm.

Another mythical old lady appears just here. This one is alleged to have approached a South Kensington Air Warden who was doing his "Take cover!" stuff, and addressed him diffidently as follows: "I beg your pardon, but will I have time to get to Victoria Station before the devastation starts? I am catching a train for Biggleswade."

When the air raids didn't come the reaction was the most bewildering readjustment many of us had ever made. Ever since 1938 we had had it thoroughly dinged into us by Germany that if war was ever declared London would be bombed by fifty German planes an hour for twelve hours—as a starter. In 1939 Poland was certainly not being let off anything. And so, even down in the Cotswolds, as per instructions, most of us laid warm clothing and gas-masks ready before we went to bed on Sunday night. It wasn't likely they'd come as far west as Cheltenham when they tried for London. If they aimed at Liverpool or Bristol we were more or less on the way. Most of us didn't think they'd even get as far as London. But it didn't occur to us that they wouldn't try.

During those first blank days we could only think that the enemy was saving up something worse for when it did come. "I can't understand this lack of attack," said the young woman who ran my hotel in her husband's absence with the Territorials near Bristol, "unless they're being *crafty!*"

Yes, that was how we felt. They must have something worse up their sleeves. Then, towards the end of the first week, the newsbills read: "ENEMY PLANES OFF THE EAST COAST." "It's begun," we said, almost with relief. It hadn't.

There were many false alarms, of course, all over England, with various funny or foolish explanations. One of the BBC's too infrequent, dead-pan jokes was the story of the caterpillar who "rashly" crawled into the mechanism of a siren somewhere in the Midlands, caused a short circuit or something, and set off the warning—its "incinerated body giving mute evidence of its guilt." And there was the story, also on the BBC, of the V-shaped formation of enemy aircraft observed off the Kentish coast at dawn which proved,

after the alarm had been given and the batteries were in position, to be a flight of wild duck. A sergeant-major "rose to the occasion" and brought down two of the birds with his rifle.

Even down in the remotest part of the country, the blackout each night was complete. It began at 7:48 on September 1st, and moved forward several minutes each night. It was timed not by what one would consider normal twilight, but by the actual setting of the sun. Before the afterglow had faded trains were Stygian, with a blue bulb in the ceiling of the carriage which was a blue bulb only and shed no illumination, making it literally impossible to see even the outline of the person opposite. Platform lights were dimmed and deeply cowled. Refreshment-rooms—there were no restaurant-cars now—and waiting-rooms were invisible from the outside, and within them all lights were hooded to a single downward beam. Crossing lights and traffic signals were reduced to meagre slits, and motor-lamps were small cowled crescents which cast no light whatever on the road ahead—because of reflections—but showed as moving specks to similar moving specks. Hand electric torches were forbidden in the streets unless veiled with two layers of tissue paper and always pointed down. High-hung lights in the hotel were removed and nothing but table-lights casting downward beams were allowed. Doorways were heavily curtained and exposed glass panes were painted opaque blue or black, which kept out a lot of daylight too. Any failure to observe these precautions brought the Wardens or the police down on you in no time.

Amongst the many blackout laughs, there was the one about the Scot who got very tight at an evening wedding, and when they asked him the next day how he got home in

the dark he replied that he had been assisted all the way by a verra kind stranger—though he couldna be sure if it was a verra short mon wi' a beard or a verra tall mon wi' a sporran.

Nervous authorities and over-zealous deputies were not solely responsible for lighting restrictions. The general population of England had no desire to become a target. And for every free soul who after a few weeks made up his mind that it was all stuff and nonsense and what if he did show a line of light somewhere, there were half a dozen community-spirited neighbours who would notify the Warden and often congregate in front of the offender's house and yell insults at him. My air-warden friends had several of these demonstrations to deal with. It was largely public opinion which enforced the blackout, as much as Sir John Anderson.

The same was true of carrying your gas-mask. It didn't matter, the Warden would explain, whether you thought the first bombs would be gas-bombs or not, or whether you had made up your mind that the mask wouldn't be any good if gas did come, or whether you just didn't want to live any more—if there was a warning and you took cover in a public shelter it was going to be pretty beastly for the ninety-nine other people who had brought their masks if you needed one and hadn't got it with you. You weren't being brave, or super-sane, or particularly jaunty if you left your gas-mask at home. You were just being damned inconsiderate.

One hears a lot about the adaptability of the human race. Without turning over a leaf on the calendar, we learned never to press a light-switch without first making sure about the curtains. And in the same space of time most of us learned —not without difficulty—to distinguish at once between the whine of a cold motor in low gear and the opening note of

the air-raid warning. (This latter effort occasioned several irascible letters to the *Times*.)

At Cheltenham we were so far from the war as to be considered a "reception area." In fact we were so "safe" that not only were children and expectant mothers evacuated on to us, but a portion of the Government itself moved its offices down into Cheltenham College and took over some of the bigger hotels and houses. (Took them over with insufficient notice, and in some cases with insufficient consideration, we heard, causing consternation and near-apoplexy to some of the inconvenienced residents.) The presence of a portion of the Home Office (or the Foreign Office, whichever it was) in our midst divided local opinion between a conviction that now we were dead certain to be a target for raids, and the more reassuring viewpoint that with the Government there, by Jove, we'd be well protected.

There were supposed to be three lines of air-defense between us and the German bombing route. As the days went by, the news from Poland gave no indication that those three lines were in any way superfluous. It seemed a little odd, perhaps, to look back during the winter stalemate on our grim expectations of the past September. It was easy, at that distance of time and space, to find reasons why England wasn't bombed at once and continually, and why it might never be bombed. I knew people who used to say they knew perfectly well all along that it wouldn't be. But they weren't there in September. I have only one answer to them, which is in no way an excuse: I *was* there.

England, if you lived there, was a little closer to Berlin and Berchtesgaden than it was comfortable during the lifetime of Adolf Hitler to be. England expected to be bombed in September. So did France.

The weather, they say, always plays up to a war. September in England was, for a fortnight at least, hot and sunny. The garden behind the hotel was large, a deep herbaceous border round two sides of a big lawn, and a paved terrace garden near the rear of the hotel where roses and snapdragons grew. The porter and the boots were both in the Volunteer Fire Brigade or something, and the garden was therefore untended except for an odd-man once or twice a week who seemed to have his hands full with mowing and pruning alone. Everywhere the beds were marred by the dry stalks of old snap-dragons going to seed, wilted heads of asters and roses, faded cosmos, dahlias, and so forth, badly in need of weeding and snipping. A few of the guests took it over, rather diffidently at first, in a potter-y sort of way, and then, as our efforts were approved, with zeal. Next year it would all go to vegetables. Let us have flowers while we could.

It is a strangely comforting thing to bend your back under a hot sun to the rhythmic snip-snap of garden shears, and see day by day the new bloom flourish, relieved of the drain of seed-making. Gardening aches are the kind that ease the heart. I shall never again stand knee-deep in scarlet antirrhinum without remembering a day in September when I straightened to watch a group of the busy little Gloucester Gladiator planes flying homewards into the setting sun, and a woman's voice beside me said casually, "Still ours, thank goodness!"

The hotel was full of old people, widows, and the Retired. I was the youngest, and the only American, and they cherished me, and I was as grateful for their kindness as a homeless puppy.

The morning papers and the mail were laid beside your

plate in the dining-room and not brought to your door, which was why I was standing at the foot of the broad white staircase in the front hall of the hotel when I first heard about the *Athenia*, on the morning of September 4th. There was a kindly man with a limp who exchanged good-morning smiles with me each day when I went in to breakfast, and he was just coming out of the lounge with a folded newspaper in his hand. I thought his first glance at me was a little searching. And then he tried to break it to me.

"I'm afraid there are some of your people in the water," he said.

I stared at him stupidly.

"They have torpedoed a liner," he explained in his gentle voice, "out of Liverpool."

I suppose I went on staring at him.

"You'd better stay here with us—it's safer." And he went on, to make his painful way up the broad stairs, the left foot always first.

It isn't likely—but I can never be sure that he didn't lay a hand on my shoulder as he passed.

Feeling a little white, I went into the dining-room and opened my papers.

"U-BOAT TORPEDOES BRITISH LINER.
LAST MESSAGE: 'SINKING QUICKLY.'
1,150 PASSENGERS."

I was a long way from home.

People who had never spoken to me before went out of their way to do so that day. Wait for convoys, they said. Don't think of leaving here till it's safer, they said. You'll go on a neutral boat, won't you—you'll wait for convoys,

won't you—things may settle down—what will Roosevelt say—remember the *Lusitania*—wait for convoys. . . .

I would explain to them that I wasn't sailing for another month anyway. They were relieved at that. They were all dears. Their conviction that while I was there with them I was safe was at that time a little pathetic, but I was grateful that they cared. And moreover I was aware that the *Athenia* sailing from Liverpool was the corresponding one to the passage I had taken the year before—so that if I had done in 1939 exactly what I did in 1938, I might have been in the water that morning myself.

As a child I had heard over and over again—with shivers, for I was a scarey child—about the unhappy hegira of Americans from Europe in 1914. Now the same war-time flight was being made again, and—in the useful cockney phrase—with knobs on. In 1914, submarines had not yet been turned against passenger liners.

When war was declared, radios had become scarce and hard to get on a rental system. But after a few days I had a portable, on the table beside my bed. It was lent to me by the mother of the bright-faced, busy little creature who ran the hotel. They had two, and could spare it. It was not put on my bill.

I sent for my luggage from London and moved into a big ground-floor bed-sitting-room in the Annex, which was across a paved, unroofed courtyard beyond the garage. There I had a bridge-table set up under the window for a writing-table, a gas-grate with a tea-ring, and a bed-table on each side of the bed, one for the radio and one for the lamp and a stack of books. There were two easy chairs. There was a sort of sideboard and a big wardrobe. There was a shining fitted basin with hot and cold running water, and the bathroom

was practically private—except for one very old gentleman who had the other two rooms on the same floor.

I use the word *gentleman* advisedly. He had a courtly charm that was not of this off-hand generation, and an irrepressible wit so delicate and apposite as to be quite unquotable—the sort of sly, spontaneous foolery that is likely to fade to nonsense by the time it gets cold in print. Our way, his and mine, to the hotel for meals led either through the garage and garden and up the back steps and through the writing-room, or into a basement door and up a flight of stairs to the hall, or—much the longest—down the drive and into the street and up the flower-rimmed front steps. One day, after we had met in the Annex passage on our way to dinner, he turned down the drive as though expecting me to follow him.

"Oh, so you go round by the front door," I said, and he replied firmly—

"Always. I think it's more *distingué*."

Perhaps it doesn't look so funny on paper.

Then there was the old lady with the deck-chair and the odd clothes. I was sitting in the sun on the lawn one day when she came up to me from behind and asked me where I had got my chair. I rose at once and offered to get her one from the little shed at the bottom of the garden where they lived. She wouldn't have that. She refused with emphasis and went away. I gave it up and dozed off again. Some minutes later I roused to see her struggling alone with a folded chair down by the shed. With something of a mutter I rose again and went to insist on lifting the thing for her. But with childish obstinacy she pulled it away from me and did it all herself, with me trailing helplessly along. And when she had got it set up where she wanted it, as it were in spite of me,

she looked up at me and said abruptly—"Are you English?"

"No," I said pleasantly, I hope, "my home is in New York."

And then, because there was nothing I could do for her, I smiled briefly and returned to my chair.

A couple of days later I ran slap into her in the passage outside the Drawing-room on the first floor, and because I had come so near to knocking her down I instinctively made the third-degree English apology—("Sorry"—"*I'm* sorry"—"I'm *so* sorry!")

I said, "I'm *so* sorry!"

"You're an American girl," she announced with her characteristic abruptness, looking up shrewdly into my face.

"Yes—I am." (I somehow got the impression that she had had to go and look New York up on the map.)

Suddenly her old, parrot face crinkled all up with a smile.

"And a very fine type, too, if I may say so," she remarked astonishingly.

"Thank you," I replied with, I am afraid, a slight bow, and opened the Drawing-room door for her.

She passed through it like a queen. We never had another conversation, beyond Good-morning and Good-night, but I am pleased to report that she always smiled at me. Perhaps my having some semblance of manners about the deck-chair had removed a long prejudice against my country, to her lingering surprise.

But there was another—and here I must use the word *lady* in all its old-fashioned significance. Age had nothing to do with her, though her hair was quite white and her blue eyes were a little weary. She looked frail, but boasted that she was "strong as a horse" and never tired. I noticed her almost the first day at Cheltenham because she sat doing

needlework in the little writing-room which looked out like a conservatory above the garden. I was writing at a desk across the room when a new arrival wearing an Edward VII hat came in and sat down at another desk close to the needlework.

Gradually I became aware of words, words, words—an interminable flow. The old lady in the hat was running on and on, near tears, but unable to stop babbling to this gentle listener the involved and incoherent story of her life. I didn't mean to eavesdrop, but she didn't know or care who heard.

"—so I came here, all rather suddenly, as you can see—but I'm used to young life all round me—I like that—I shall never be old, I always say, as long as I have young life round me—both boys in the RAF—I do so *long* for them to come back—I beg your pardon, I'm talking—talking—I have such a need to get it out to someone—feel so helpless—give up the house entirely if war really comes—Duke of Kent got back safely from his holiday in Europe—glad to have him home again—just think, I was at George V's wedding—oh, yes, I was, I saw it all—and Alexandra, with the tears running down her cheeks because she had lost her eldest son, you know—she was a lovely creature—seems so long ago now, doesn't it—"

And every now and then the sweet face bent above the needlework would nod or smile. And every now and then the understanding, unheeded murmur would slide into the spate of words—"Yes—I know—yes—no—fancy!—" Weeks later, when we were old friends, I told her about my eavesdropping, and how she had gone on saying, "Yes—no—fancy!" and finally the poor old thing in the hat felt better and went away. She laughed till she nearly wept, and said

she must tell her niece about it, because it was exactly what she always did say at times like that—yes, no, and fancy.

Her table was next mine in the dining-room, but we each had the same habit—we took a book to meals with us, and read it while we ate. On a day before I had got the radio in my room Roosevelt was to make a speech, and at luncheon she offered me the use of hers if I wanted to hear him. Strange as it may seem, I didn't care an awful lot about hearing him, I knew pretty well what he wasn't going to say. But I thought it would be uncivil not to accept her kindness, though goodness knows she didn't press it. At the end of the meal I followed her up to her little room on the top floor, in order to learn how the radio worked so I could turn it on whenever I liked, she said, whether she was there or not. It was a lived-in-looking room, with portraits on the mantelpiece and framed needlework on the walls. It looked out across the garden to the Cotswold skyline—*"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. . . ."*

The little room was her home. Before I left it, within fifteen minutes, we were fond of each other with an affection which was to grow each day and which will always endure.

She used to come and sit with me at the end of the day—days which were for me abnormally long and empty and lonely. We told each other stories and spoke of people dear to us, in an intimacy as sudden and unquestioning as that between two shipwrecked mariners on a desert island. I don't know quite how I should have passed those first slow, unreal days of the war without her.

She would bring her knitting—which was always something warm and bright designed for indigent old ladies in almshouses, because, she said, everybody else was knitting for the soldiers, and *somebody* had to go on looking after the

old ladies—and I, who cannot knit, did needlework. Because we had only one lamp that was good to see by, and it stood on one of the bedside tables, she sat in a chair drawn close to it and I propped myself up with pillows on the bed. As the evenings got chillier we had a gas-fire, sometimes a spot of port-wine, or a box of chocolates. Sometimes we would make a call on the old gentleman across the passage, with whom she had a long and quarrelsome friendship. And then, before she went home to the hotel on the other side of the courtyard, her small electric torch making a ring of light round her crisp footsteps, we would hear the eleven o'clock news broadcast, pooling our fortitude and our hope in order to get through one more long black night.

Cheltenham felt as secure as any town in England could. The Post Office and the Police Station were sand-bagged, and the big plate glass windows in the Promenade were taped in criss-cross patterns. The little green squares and the lawns and the Public Gardens were all dug up for trench shelters. Cinemas and theatres were closed. The infant school across the way from the hotel went out in its daily crocodile with little brown gas-mask carriers bobbing on each child's back.

Down there in the Cotswolds there were times when you almost forgot, guiltily, that we were at war. Equally, there were days when you felt sick all the time, and small talk became a duty faithfully performed because silences would not do; when reminiscence was a joy to be shared, and cheerful anecdote became an art.

Each morning just before eight there was the comfortable squeak of a carpet-sweeper in the passage outside my door. One came up slowly those first mornings of September, from the black sleep of nervous exhaustion to an unwilling consciousness of something wrong, and then woke with a final

wrench—to war. Blindly in the darkened room one groped for the radio on the bedside table, its pointer set perpetually at the British news wavelength. The button snapped. Some cheery record would be just finishing.

One lay there, awaiting with impatience and dread the eight o'clock broadcast. "Here is a short news bulletin," he would begin. It was always a good sign if he said "short." And then if he went on to say, "There has been no substantial change on the Western Front," one drew a long, thankful breath. Or better still, he might say, "There has been no outstanding news during the night." But soon we came to those dreadful days when each time the opening sentence was the same simple statement: "Warsaw is still holding out. . . ."

After breakfast you did your gardening, or went up to the lending library in the Promenade to change a book. A fresh, unread book, or even two at once, had become a nightly necessity to all readers-in-bed. On the way back you stopped for coffee and digestive biscuits at the roof-garden café in the Promenade. (If you fell for the chocolate-coated biscuits wrapped in coloured tinfoil you spoilt your luncheon and were sorry.) From your table you looked down on the green arch of the chestnuts and the bright hanging-baskets of bloom which were affixed to each lamp-post. (And why is it that even the best tea-rooms in England are afflicted with that awkward wicker furniture, small, unyielding chairs and many-legged tables which are fashioned always to catch you one on the knee or the ankle?)

If you stopped for coffee you missed the eleven o'clock news broadcast, but you saw the noon edition contents-bills of the papers. There was another news broadcast at tea time.

Some days they were almost all alike, and you were actually thankful for no news. But you couldn't count on that.

Dogs were not allowed in the hotel itself, but I was in the Annex. There was a gas-ring in my bed-sitting-room, and I bought a kettle at Woolworth's in the High Street, and a brown earthenware tea-pot, each costing sixpence. I found some excellent China tea at Cavendish House, which is a department store with a lavish Provisions, that is to say Grocery, section. And with some pastries from the little shop at the end of the Promenade, and bread-and-butter sent in from the hotel, and the dishes from my picnic basket, it was my privilege to have very informal teas in my room which Honey could attend, with whatever members of her entourage felt like coming.

A little before six o'clock on most days Pam (or Pish) and Honey went home, and Dorothy, if she was not already there, would arrive to have dinner with me. She and I would sit together in the gathering twilight, each nursing a slight whiskey-and-water in a tooth-glass, and listen to the long six o'clock news broadcast. Sometimes we needed the whiskey pretty badly. Sometimes we were able to feel that things might be worse.

But it is not a good time of day to sit about, without lamplight, with summer fading daily, and one's own little personal world torn up by the roots—listening to the cracking of the universe. Gradually, between you and the person in the shadowy armchair opposite, a wordless, invisible bond is formed. You question with a glance, and comment with a twist of the lips. The room seems to have no walls but silence, and you are only two against terror, while the BBC, as detached and inexorable as the voice of God, doles out your doom. Your mind plays tricks in the twilight. And you

think of people you have loved, but not enough—and of happiness you have known without sufficient gratitude—of places you may never see the same again—of things you have always meant to do, and now there may not be time. . . .

✦

"I trust I may live to see the day when Hitlerism has been destroyed, and a restored and liberated Europe has been re-established," said Mr. Chamberlain in the House of Commons on Sunday, September 3rd. (Loud and prolonged cheers.)

M. Daladier's words a few hours later in Paris were typical of the man and the nation: "The cause of France is the cause of peace, and our cause will be victorious. On the sacred ground of France Liberty finds one of its last refuges. Vive la France."

Hitler said: "Now that Poland has undertaken even acts of aggression against Reich territory, I have determined to blow up this ring which has been laid round Germany."

Twenty-five years before, the Kaiser (slightly period now) had said: "In the midst of perfect peace the enemy surprises us. Therefore to arms! We shall resist to the last breath of man and horse!"

On Monday the *Express* printed a facsimile of its front page of August 4th, 1914, which carried the famous "MAD DOG OF EUROPE" headline. "INVASION OF RUSSIA" was another. The Kaiser's troops had occupied three towns—and the three towns had Polish names. There was a picture on the front page that day in 1914—the picture of a boy in a midshipman's uniform. The caption beneath it read: "Prince Albert, second son of the King and Queen, a midshipman in

the Navy, is at sea with the Fleet." The headline above it was: "HEAVY FIRING HEARD IN THE NORTH SEA." On another page of the *Express* of September 4th, 1939, there is another picture of Prince Albert. And its caption reads: "The King, in the uniform of Admiral of the Fleet, broadcasting last night from his study in Buckingham Palace." George VI, towards the end of his speech that night, had said: "But we can only do the right as we see the right, and reverently commit our cause to God."

Monday morning's papers announced, alongside the first news of the *Athenia*, the return of Winston Churchill to the Cabinet as First Lord of the Admiralty—the same post he had held in 1914—even the same room, with the portrait of Pepys on the wall, the same desk, the same chair—the same enemy.

General Sir William Edmund ("Tiny") Ironside, G.C.B., was named Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Perhaps I should mention that the tininess of General Ironside consists of his standing six feet four (an inch or so taller when he's angry, they say) and weighing heaven knows what of solid brawn. General the Viscount ("Tiger") Gort, V.C., became Commander-in-Chief of the British Field Forces—Haig's old job. John Standish Surtees Prendergast Vereker, 6th Viscount Gort, was only 53 in 1939. The one-syllable account of his 1918 V.C. reads as follows: "Twice wounded, he directed his men from a stretcher for a time, but got to his feet again to lead them in a successful attack, and organized the defence of the captured ground before collapsing." He has the squared jaw, humorous mouth, and level blue eyes of what seems to be the typical British officer. "Trust in Gort—" said the wags inevitably, "—and—keep—your—powder—dry—" (*diminuendo*).

These were the men who would work side by side with France's General Marie Gustave Gamelin, who was said to have drawn up the plan which saved Paris in 1914. Young men for the job, all three of them, as generals go—but old enough to remember the mistakes which were made before, murderous mistakes such as Passchendaele.

The first two weeks of war crept past us at Cheltenham with a sense of fantastic unreality. Except for the blackout, which by then had got to 7:05 P.M., and a brief shortage of fish, and the gas-mask, trench-digging, and sand-bagged landscape, there was little to bring it home to us in our daily life that we were at war, as the French said, *à outrance*. The garden dazzled in the sunlight. Butter, sugar, meat, etc., were not yet affected by rationing, though the price of whiskey was to go up soon. Petrol rationing was set for September 16th and then postponed a week—allowing about ten gallons a month at about 1/6 a gallon.

Oxford was announced to open as usual on October 15th. Shops in the Promenade displayed smart one-piece hooded "siren suits" for quick dressing in night air-raid alarms, and gas-mask carriers in all sorts of fancy shapes and fabrics. For 2/6 I got a plain brown leathery affair like a binoculars case, which had room in the top for the necessary piece of soap to keep the eye-piece from clouding. People who had been too precipitate about having pets mercifully destroyed in anticipation of air and gas attacks were bewailing their tragic loss. The BBC Home Service was criticized for its dullness—the level tones of the news announcers reading bulletins which contained very little news (we had no reason to suppose that there was very much news, but it seemed as though there ought to be) got on people's nerves; the chimes, and the time-pips, and the prosy recordings of semi-

classical music lacked variety. But the BBC staff had been hastily chucked down in the country somewhere and was over-worked and over-restricted. Once in a flash of imaginative thinking it put on a programme of cowboy records to follow a speech of Roosevelt's. And once it gave us a full quarter hour of nothing but Bing Crosby records, which made me so sentimental about the U. S. A. I could have wept. As an alternative to being bored by the BBC, we invented a very satisfying parlour-game, which was to sit round and devise awful ends for Hitler when the day of reckoning should overtake him. "*We're* too soft," said the English at once. "Let's hope *we* don't have the disposal of him. St. Helena's much too good for Hitler. France might think of something. What would France do to him, d'ya think. . . ." And so on. One of the fruitiest ideas was to dump him down in the middle of Warsaw with a label round his neck and just leave him there, alone. It wouldn't be long, we said cheerfully. An announcement from the Government that it was anticipating and preparing for a 3-year war gave a certain impetus to this innocent pastime of forecasting Hitler's ultimate fate.

While the Territorial call-up and the various volunteer civilian defence corps left certain very noticeable gaps in male civilian circles, there was no visible drainage of men from the streets and restaurants over night. We had a story, of course, about the Piccadilly club where a vintage voice was heard booming: "This is the end of civilization. I suppose you know the billiards marker is gone?"

But in 1939 there was no necessity, so far, for civilians to throw themselves by thousands into the trenches. No two wars are ever alike, but in view of the dissatisfaction in some quarters at the relative inactivity of the Allied forces during

the winter of 1939 it was interesting to contemplate a remark of Kitchener's reported by Grey, in 1914. "When the opposing armies had dug themselves in from Switzerland to the sea," he writes, "no one was more perplexed than Kitchener. 'I don't know what is to be done,' he said to me more than once; 'this isn't *war*.' "

There was no way to transport an army to Poland, any more than there had been any way to get at a possible war in Czechoslovakia the year before, and some people expressed the opinion now that Prague should give thanks, even in its present desolation, that the decision to stop Hitler had not been made, after all, in 1938. General Gamelin showed no inclination to pile up Allied dead in wholesale attacks against the Siegfried Line, though he was steadily nibbling a sharp salient into German territory round Saarbruecken.

In fact, with the new militia men in training and the Territorials at full strength, the British Government showed singularly little interest in recruiting, and this, as usual, produced its anecdote, which ran:

Two men who had not seen each other for some time met in Piccadilly.

"Hello," said one. "I thought you were in Scotland."

"I was, but I came up to Town to enlist."

"You must have influence!" cracked the first man.

Well, it was good for one day's laugh.

The RAF leaflet raids over Germany, which began on September 5th and continued almost daily, caused considerable discussion, not untinged with amusement. The British planes were often not engaged at all, and reported no losses.

About 6,000 leaflets were dropped each time, bearing a résumé in German of the reasons for the war, or a summary of Hitler's broken promises, or the text of the broadcast made by Mr. Chamberlain in German on the 5th.

Across the top of each leaflet were printed the words: "THIS MIGHT HAVE BEEN A BOMB." Some people thought the leaflet raids wholly futile, and some considered them a very imaginative stroke. Most people forgot that it was an idea left over from the last war and not an invention of the present Ministry. If its purpose was to prove to the German people that the RAF *could* bomb German cities when and if it chose, and at the same time to leave any cross-Channel bombing to be started by the Nazi air force, it must have succeeded. Certainly it rattled the Nazi Government somewhat, as apparently many Germans had not been aware that there was any war going on except in Poland, and their awakening to war with France and Britain must have been a rude one. Only the first raid was reported in the German newspapers, small children were used to clean up the litter, and heavy penalties were imposed on any person caught reading or passing on a leaflet. But soon copies were found in the pockets of German prisoners taken on the Western Front.

Leaflet stories flourished too. The best, which by now is very well known, was about the young British pilot who was two days overdue back at his aerodrome, and on his arrival was summoned into the presence of his CO:

"What in the world have you been doing all this time?" demanded the officer, or words to that effect.

"Distributing leaflets in Germany, sir."

"It doesn't take anybody two days to drop leaflets," he was informed, as it were.

"Drop them?" he cried in astonishment. "I thought you wanted us to push them under the doors!"

Assuming that the leaflet raids were traceable to an order from the British Commander-in-Chief, it was suggested that the German slogan for the war of 1939 should be: *Gort mit uns.*

There were no leaflets concerned in the RAF flight to the mouth of the Kiel Canal on September 5th, however. Several direct hits on German ships were scored and there were casualties on both sides. An American commentator summed it up: "The RAF have got the German fleet absolutely flat-footed in a daylight raid. First blood to the British."

French troops, fighting in khaki now except for the famous *chausseurs*, were driving deep into the Saar territory and forcing the hurried evacuation of German border villages. The papers carried almost daily reports about disorders in German cities, secret German radio stations for broadcasting the truth, public dismay at new taxes, further food shortage, etc.; reports also of bad food, bad air, and damp in the Siegfried Line. These reports did not merely represent that thing most exasperatingly known as "wishful thinking," on the part of the British newspapers. Germany did without doubt react unhappily to the realization that the Fuehrer had at last overreached himself and got them into war. But the first feeble signs of that reaction were so ruthlessly stamped out that apathy set in again, and the flood of paranoic propaganda closed over the heads of the objectors. German troops captured on the Polish front were said to have specially printed editions of Berlin newspapers from

which all news of a war on the Western Front had been omitted.

Goebbels would have it in his Press that England was in a very bad way, and printed a sob story about how the babies of London were crying for milk. The English papers commented briefly that London had plenty of milk and no babies.

Hitler graciously acceded to Roosevelt's appeal that he refrain from bombing civilians, and at the end of the first fortnight an estimated 20,000 Polish civilians had been killed by German bombs. But during that first fortnight Poland had contrived to give a very good account of herself, for a country with almost no natural boundaries, and in spite of her awkward salient frontier which she had been repeatedly advised to straighten. Her air force was pitiful and her precious cavalry was far less effective than she wanted to admit. It amounted to suicide when gallant young men rode out with sabres and lances to use Balaclava tactics against heavy mechanized German units. The Polish strategists had counted on the autumn rains to make the roads impassable, and the rains had not begun.

Foreign correspondents and diplomats were leaving Warsaw, which under the leadership of its heroic mayor prepared to dig itself in and become another Verdun or Madrid. Women, girls, and young boys toiled with spades in the trenches. Being fought over was of course nothing new to Warsaw. The Swedes had taken it in 1655, the Poles retook it in 1656; Sweden took it again in 1702, and the following year it was free again. The Russians took it in 1764, and again in 1794, and then it was given to Prussia. Napoleon occupied it in 1806, the Austrians took it in 1809, and the Russians got it back in 1813. In 1830 and 1862 it was the

scene of terrible insurrections, with bloodshed, executions, and deportations. There was more rioting and bloodshed in 1905. In 1915 it was taken over by the Germans, and in 1918 the Poles were able to set up their own Government. Obviously Warsaw was used to trouble. But there were certain refinements of modern warfare for which she was not quite prepared.

With reference to the question: Why didn't the Allies *do* something to save Poland, the following facts and figures have to be taken into consideration. The distance from London to Warsaw is about 900 miles as the crow flies—that is, straight over neutral territory and Germany. A bomber attempting to follow the crow would have been subject to the anti-aircraft fire of either Holland or Germany most of the way. From France's western border to Warsaw the crow—or the bomber—must fly about 600 miles over German anti-aircraft defences. Roundabout routes involved Scandinavian, Swiss, Italian, and Hungarian neutrality and gunfire, besides cruelly increasing the distance. Well, that's all right, we say, bombers have a range of over 1,000 miles. True. But as one American paper put it: "To send heavy, slow, long-range bombers to Poland would be futile. They would court certain destruction on the way. Even if they arrived, they would fall a ready prey to faster German fighters. Pursuit planes and interceptors are the only types that might check the bombers that are now raining destruction on Poland, but these types were not designed for long-range action." The so-called shuttle-bombing scheme, across Germany from France at great heights, with a landing in Poland before the return flight, was thwarted by the destruction in the first few days of the war of what few landing-fields Poland had provided. And wilful violation of neutral territory by the

Allies would have set a precedent Germany would have been quick to take advantage of. Therefore, once the undeclared war had begun, the RAF was not much good to Poland—though we had heard as early as August that 200 British planes had quietly disappeared in that direction. From London to Berlin, while we're doing sums, is only about 580 miles, and from Paris to Berlin it is a little less. But the sheer barbarism of bombing each other's capitals was something each Power still waited for the other to begin. Even the Poles in their agony could recognize that attacks on Berlin by Allied planes, and the inevitable reprisals on London and Paris, would not save Warsaw whole. Counter attacks on Berlin might have been made from Warsaw, but Warsaw soon had almost nothing to make them with.

In a detailed military article published during the first fortnight of the war, the ways available to a land army trying to succour Poland were tabulated thus: (1) via the Black Sea and Rumania—complicated by the attitude taken up by Rumania and Italy; (2) Gamelin's favourite back-door route through Italy—blocked by Italy's "non-belligerency"; (3) Britain's project to force the mined Baltic Sea route—but Poland's short sea-coast was almost at once controlled by Germany; (4) the landing of British forces on Germany's northern sea-coast—against Germany's fortified positions, massed army and air-force defences, a suicidal undertaking; and lastly, hurling thousands of Allied troops to certain death against the German West Wall—which would not have diverted enough of Germany's power from the Eastern Front in time to do enough good.

So there it was. Both times—in Belgium and in Poland—Germany was bound to win the first round by sheer bloodiness.

Sir Nevile Henderson had had a nasty time getting out of Germany, and was not allowed to cross the Dutch frontier until the German Embassy staff from London was ready simultaneously to cross on to German soil. He then returned to England aboard a Dutch steamer, and two attempts to torpedo the boat in the Channel were warded off by depth charges dropped by the escort of British destroyers. So much for the German conception of the centuries-old tradition of safe-conduct for the diplomatic corps. If Henderson's boat had gone down, German propaganda was doubtless prepared to say, as it said of the *Athenia*, that the British Admiralty sank it in order to put the blame on Germany.

There were air-raid alarms in Paris, London, and Berlin, but no bombs were dropped. The usual war-time rumours occurred. Percy up in London heard that Swindon had been bombed (a railway junction not too far from Cheltenham) and we in Cheltenham heard that Hull or Blackpool had been smashed. But on the whole, rumour has been a little scotched by hourly radio fact.

Newspapers said that the United States arms embargo would soon be lifted by a special session of Congress, and I was advised to get home before that happened, in case German submarines hit an American ship then just for luck. The *Athenia* survivors were clamouring for convoy, and with Hitler's new order out to sink at sight, it was not readily understood in England why American convoys were not forthcoming. Some fairly dicky little coastwise steamers were being despatched across the Atlantic to repatriate stranded Americans, of whom there was a colony at Weston-super-Mare, living under very trying conditions and getting very low in funds.

At the end of the first week Goering had made a speech,

in which he babbled of the Fuehrer's love of peace, demanding who declared war anyway, and why was Britain fighting?—followed by a naive attempt to drive a wedge between Britain and France, and the airy statement that Germany could get along without America. "GOERING'S PEACE TRY-ON" said the Sunday papers only. They were more preoccupied with the mystery of Russian mobilization, which was reported to be taking place on a large scale. It seemed a little much to lay it just to mistrust of Germany's approach towards the Russian border. The Russians were being told that it was in the nature of precautions against a mass Polish retreat over the border.

The bombing of Polish towns was sickening, and everywhere in the reports occurred the words "taken by surprise." How and why, we wondered, could Poland be taken by surprise? The villages, of course, had no form of air-defence. It was said that more civilians had died than soldiers. The great mass of the army was supposed to be retreating in good order, with excellent morale. Retreating to what? Poland seemed to have done little all summer but "remain calm." She had prepared no second or third line defences, no entrenchments along a shortened frontier. Even after Germany occupied Slovakia on August 19th there was time for Poland to have done *something*. The Polish people were beginning furtively to blame their leaders, and Smigley-Ridz had offered his resignation. It appeared to be largely his fault that the Polish High Command had ignored repeated advice from the French to sacrifice territory in the west in order to prepare a more defensible frontier. Cracow had fallen almost without a fight—a railway junction, in a poor strategic position, but bearing a name of enormous sentimental value in Poland. Railroads,

communications, landing-fields were all gone, and the refugee routes to Rumania were harried constantly by German planes. Food was scarce. The Government of Poland was in continuous flight from one refuge to another. The Mayor of Warsaw seemed the only leader left of courage and resource. If Warsaw had had barrage-balloons perhaps the dreadful dive-bombing and machine-gunning of its population would not have been so easy. But the chief disaster was that the Polish air force hardly existed any more; nor had any comprehension of the need for an air force apparently ever existed in the minds of the Polish Command, in its obstinate preoccupation with cavalry and bad roads. And the rains still held off.

Even if Warsaw itself fell, the Poles were still supposed to be able to rally for a deadly guerilla warfare which could go on forever, once the weather turned. It was a great nation—once it had stretched to the Black Sea—once Sobieski had taken Vienna from the Turks—once they had stopped Hindenburg at the Vistula—and in 1920 the Bolsheviks had got to the very gates of Warsaw and been thrown back. If only the army would soon get behind sound defences on a shortened front—if only they had an air force—if only they wouldn't try to stop German tanks with cavalry. . . .

By the end of the second week the cinemas had opened again in England—no one admitted without a gas-mask—and a British Expeditionary Force had landed in France without the loss of a man. A large contingent had marched through Cheltenham a few days before I arrived there, but in marked contrast to 1914, troop movements in England were practically invisible at this time. It was said that in London at night, during the abnormal stillness of the blackout, you could hear the distant rumble of the lorries trans-

porting soldiers to the ports. But there were few troop-laden trains, bands, flags, and cheering villagers, until they got to France where an enthusiastic welcome was given to *les Anglais*.

One night I went out to post a letter in the pillar-box at the corner beyond the hotel, just as darkness closed in. The dim, tree-bordered street was empty, but I heard a sound I had never heard just that way before, and would just as soon not hear again—the rhythmic *plunk, plunk, plunk* of marching feet, and for its only accompaniment a whistled tune, thin and small as a single flute in the dusk. I stood still and listened, while my own heart thumped with the distant beat of Army boots on concrete. Before God, I could not locate that troop in time to see it. At first I thought the sound came from the left, and started in that direction. But after a few steps I decided it was round the block the other way. It seemed to come from everywhere at once, as though they marched in the sky. Out of eery moments like that one the legends grow of ghost-battalions and legions of the dead come home. While I hesitated, the throb of their footsteps grew fainter and they were gone.

That week the registration of aliens was required in Britain, which took me to the Police Station, a sand-bagged Georgian mansion which had come down in the world, but still retained its lovely old woodwork. Above a remarkable curved door opening off the foyer was a new sign which read something about Aliens, and I went in. To my disappointment the room beyond did not contain one of those youthful monuments of British courtesy and charm, a policeman. Instead there was a rather tiresome young man who wasn't interested in my proffered passport, and merely suggested that I go to the local photographer and have a picture

made, copies of which would be sent to him, and he would then notify me to come and give information for my registration. Conscientiously I pointed out that the time for registration expired in a couple of days, and he replied without a flicker that as I was not an enemy alien the time limit didn't much matter. That was British bureaucracy.

I retreated to the photographer's, which was reached by a paved path through the churchyard in the middle of the town, and found at the top of ramshackle stairs a shabby den of cobwebs and antique equipment presided over by a polite old gentleman who took as much trouble as though it was a wedding photograph at least, and charged me 2/6. I never heard from either him or the Police Station again. In fact, until I got to the Passport Office at Cardiff I forgot about them.

On Sunday the 17th, too late for the morning papers, the news came that Russian troops had marched westward and Poland was stabbed in the back. It left us stunned and incredulous. At the same time it made some other things a little clearer. This was all a part of the villainous understanding behind the Nazi-Soviet Pact—and doubtless part of the insurmountable obstacles which had arisen against an Anglo-Soviet agreement. Britain was not prepared to pay a high enough price for Soviet friendship. Germany was in the mood to pay any price at all. (Further items of the price Germany had been in the mood to pay were to be revealed three months hence in Finland.)

Warsaw and the main Polish army, trapped between the two advancing armies, announced defiantly that they would fight on, and then the heartbreaking broadcasts of the Warsaw radio were temporarily silenced. Lord Haw-Haw of Zeesen now made his appearance on the German air-waves—

speaking German propaganda with an aggressively English intonation which immediately won his nickname from English listeners. He was guilty of occasional slips, as when he said "Sir Winston Churchill" and then lapsed into a hasty, "*Ach, nein,* I mean Mr. Winston Churchill." His identity remains a mystery, though many guesses have been made. The British took him to their hearts at once in the old "Hymn of Hate" style, and would quote him with derisive chortles at tea. As usual, the childish simplicity of the German propaganda mind caused them no end of amusement. More lately, there are a few people in England who incline to regard Lord Haw-Haw as a menace, because listening to him has become such a popular pastime that they feel some of his less obvious propaganda might take root, in the subconscious at least. Another and less popular début round about this time was Uncle Boo-Hoo from Russia, who described with tears in his voice how Polish grandmothers had kissed the hands of the Russian soldiers who came as their deliverers from Polish oppression.

On Monday afternoon the news of the sinking of the British aircraft carrier *Courageous* reached us. From then on life in England took on an overtone which was distinctly grimmer than before. It is important to remember that the English treasure their Navy with an almost un-English sentiment. That is to say, they are not as off-hand about the Navy as they are about most things. For centuries it has been their peculiar pride, and it is the chief chink in their emotional armour. The average Englishman does his best to conceal his love for his dog, his horse, his home, and his wife—but he has an unabashed tenderness for the Fleet. The loss of the *Courageous* was the first big naval disaster of the war, with only about 600 saved out of a company of about

1,100. The Spartan English custom of sending mere children to sea as ratings was noticed again when pictures were printed of a fair-haired fifteen-year-old bugler who was the youngest survivor. He looked about ten.

The blackout had crept forward day by day till the curtains were being drawn before dinner began. The garden was chilly except in the midday sun, but it went on blooming luxuriantly. The flowers in the hanging-baskets in the Promenade faded and disappeared. Colour drained out of the world and an autumn drabness set in, punctuated by cloudy greens and browns and misty blues. I wore knitted jumpers and tweeds, and my fire burned most of the time.

People's dividends were down, at the same time that speculation about the war-time Budget was up. A shilling on the income-tax was certain, everybody said—maybe 1/3. It stood at 5/6 in the pound—about $1.33 in each $5.00. Tobacco and spirits were sure to go up too, we said philosophically. The price of petrol wouldn't matter much to most people any more.

In 1800, when Pitt had a war on, he proposed and carried an income-tax of two shillings in the pound, and the shilling was worth more then than it is today. In 1816, after Waterloo, income-tax was abolished. Imagine it. There wasn't any. There wasn't any until 1842, when Peel got sevenpence in the pound put on. The Crimean War raised it to 1/2. By 1874 it had fallen to tuppence in the pound. The Boer War brought it to a shilling, and it stood at 1/2 in 1914. In 1918 it had got to 5/ and in 1922 it was 6/. During the next ten years it fell as low as 4/ and in 1938 had reached its present 5/6.

The "Blackout Budget" was revealed on September 27th to require a rise of two shillings in the pound, with reduced

concessions and personal allowances. Surtax, excess profits, death duties all went up.

It was much worse than anyone had anticipated—the worst ever in Britain, 1/6 higher than it had stood at the end of what was beginning to be known almost with affection as the Old War. How did they take it? Much the way the House of Commons took it. All the newspaper accounts of the reaction in the House to the Chancellor's speech were fairly similar. The one quoted below is from the *Telegraph*.

"No Chancellor of the Exchequer of our time or any time has had such a surprise for the House of Commons as Sir John Simon provided today.

"When he rose, though the benches were crowded as usual for the opening of a Budget, there was little sign of the tense curiosity such revelations normally excite. Members seemed to have made up their minds that they knew the broad outline of what the Chancellor was going to demand.

"He had been speaking for a quarter of an hour, two former Chancellors, the Prime Minister and Mr. Churchill, gravely attentive besides him, before he came to the details of the 'heavy sacrifices' before us with the remark that the income-tax must be 'substantially increased.'

"Socialists were delighted and nobody was startled by that, but Sir John took some 10 more minutes to expound the theory of his scheme and a certain impatience developed.

"Laughter and cheers broke out when at last he remarked that he had spent 'enough time in generalities.' In the suave tones of a Chancellor mentioning some trivial infliction came the announcement of an income tax of 7s 6d in the pound.

"For moments which could be reckoned there was pro-

found silence, then came from more than one throat a queer whistling gasp, and at that everybody began to laugh.

"If a Parliamentary expert had been asked how the House would take the imposition of taxation heavy beyond anybody's thoughts, heavier than has ever been borne, he would hardly have predicted this jovial scene.

CONTINUOUS HILARITY

"But it was characteristic of the House of Commons and even more characteristically national. The rest of the swingeing increases were heard with continuous hilarity.

"When the Chancellor talked of 9s 6d in the pound of surtax on the top of 7s 6d income-tax the House laughed. He stopped after delivering the blow to drink water, and his thirst was cheered.

"There was even laughter when Sir John announced a heavy addition of estate duty on the property of those who die after today.

" 'Acting with fierceness' was the Chancellor's own description of his new taxation, and the House chuckled from point to point as if it wanted more. There was no doubt of the readiness to pay the price of victory."

It should be remembered, too, that the Chancellor's audience in the House that day was the exact class which would be most heavily hit by the new increases—the people of above-average, independent, comfortable income—for few M.P.'s count their stipend of £600 a year as a very considerable part of their resources. And their first reaction was to laugh.

Hitler went to Danzig for his triumph there (compliments of Stalin) and made one of his noisier speeches, prom-

ising 3,000 planes to wipe out British harbours, threatening five bombs to one if British planes dared come to Germany, and mentioning direfully a new and secret weapon which could not be used against him. An enormous concentration of German planes at Aachen, near the French border, was reported. But for some mysterious reason they stayed there, on the ground.

The Czechs continued to erupt in spite of brutal reprisals, and they developed a genius for incommoding their oppressors by a quiet sort of maffia of their own which exposed nothing to pin reprisals on. They sugared the petrol in German military machinery. Two Czech motor cars abreast would suddenly break down and jam traffic behind them, miraculously recovering just as the sweating German police were about to call out the reserves. Trams and buses would be boycotted to a dead loss for days. The peasants would regretfully have no milk at all for butter-making, unless German soldiers were posted on the farms to see what became of it. The numerous and complicated printed forms so dear to the German official heart caused infinite perplexity and delay among crowds of earnest-faced Czechs who queued up to ask innumerable questions full of anxious zeal in order to avoid making mistakes—and then somehow the forms would be filled in all wrong and have to be returned for corrections. Factory production developed lag and error, so that a complicated system of guards had to be established to see that the workers worked. Sabotage, confusion, and ridicule, plus 9,000,000 stubborn potential rebels, were Germany's chief profits from the Munich deal.

It was estimated that Germany had suffered 150,000 casualties in Poland, and Russia had got the lion's share of the assets without doing any of the fighting. As Poland's re-

sistance crumpled and Warsaw, after ten days' martyrdom, asked for terms, it was gleefully announced from Berlin that now many seasoned divisions would be freed for use against the Allies on the Western Front. But we speculated at tea time about the probable effect on the undoubted high spirits of the victorious German troops, most of whom were still unaware that there was a Western Front, when—after weeks of very punishing fighting in Poland—they were promptly loaded into trains and despatched across Germany to the Siegfried Line to confront a spot of bother there with England and France.

Towards the end of the month, Mussolini made another one of his peace proposals. It was not very well received. One of the weaknesses of the totalitarian concept is the blind conviction that if a thing works once, it will always work again. To a dictator, the world must resemble a slot-machine. Put in the same coin, pull the same lever, and you get the same peanuts. Great Britain and France are not slot-machines. Not yet. The time can still come when you get a poke in the nose instead of peanuts.

Meanwhile the date of my sailing drew nearer, complicated by a shipping strike in New York which had delayed all eastbound sailings, so that nobody in London seemed to know when the boat in question would arrive in Southampton, much less depart again westward. Only a day or so before the date set for our sailing from England, I received from the steamship office in London a rather harassed-looking letter which mentioned with great casualness an Exit Permit. I had never heard of such a thing.

From the phone-box in the hotel I spoke with a harassed-sounding man in the London office, who said I would have to come up to Town and get the Permit before I could sail.

With trains as they were, it was only just humanly possible. Desperately I rang up Percy in London. He was intelligent, efficient, helpful, and prompt. Whitehall itself couldn't have functioned better. He talked to all the right people at once by phone, and in no time at all rang back to Cheltenham to say that there were queues clean round the block all day in London, but I could get a Permit at Cardiff where there wouldn't be such a mob.

I pricked up my ears at that. Cardiff? I had never set foot across the Welsh border. Cardiff, by all means. Might as well snaffle a trip to Wales out of this war.

And anyway, it was nearer Cheltenham than London. The trains, even on reduced schedule, would do it in a day —a beautiful, sunny autumn day it was, too.

There was only one drawback. My always tyrannical insides, which had stood up to things pretty well so far, had begun to domineer a bit during the confusion about dates and packing and what-not. They resented, in advance, the overcrowded and abnormally strained conditions of wartime sailings. I had to be very careful what I ate, and I felt like the dickens most of the time.

In these circumstances a day-long jaunt alone to Cardiff looked just a bit much, and Dorothy was not available that day. Thoughtfully I climbed the stairs to the little room on the top floor where the blue-eyed lady lived. I told her All. And then, rather diffidently, for she *didn't* look strong, I said: "You wouldn't like to go to Cardiff with me—as a sort of holiday?"

And as though I had suggested going round to the library about a book, she said: "When do we start?"

She had made up her mind to go long before I got to that part of it.

That is another of the days that I hope never to forget. The sun shone, the air was crisp and clear. We bought chocolate to eat in the train, as our tea might be late if we were kept long at the Passport Office, the address of which was written down on a piece of paper in my passport; and we had no slightest idea how to get there after we reached Cardiff. We wouldn't get back to Cheltenham till after the blackout, and we had arranged for a car to meet us at the station and for dinner to be kept for us at the hotel. The whole thing took on a picnic atmosphere—at least so long as we took no notice of why we were going to Cardiff.

Ribbentrop might be in Moscow again, being dined and fêted and patted on the back—Ribbentrop, the ex-champagne-salesman, was said to find Russian champagne just a mite as-the-French-say formeedah-ble. Ribbentrop might be trying for an active military alliance to bring Russia in against the Allies, which was bad. But just for today, just for a few hours, I was going to be in Wales, where the signs on the station platforms begin with a double *l*, and the distant hills lie round and blue against a pale sky.

The train went to Gloucester and then turned sharply southwestward along the west bank of the Severn, where it splays out into Bristol Channel. There were khaki-clad sentries at the bridges, and once we saw a few open flat-cars on a siding carrying spindly little guns in water-proof muzzles. The tide was down, and the mud banks glistened on either side of the water. Before we got to Chepstow those blue Welsh hills lay on our right. And at Chepstow the castle ruin can be seen from the train, which I had not expected.

It stands on a rock overhanging the Wye just before that most exquisite of rivers joins the Severn to the sea, and from a little distance its rounded Norman curtain wall, twenty

feet thick, looks almost intact. It was built soon after the Conquest by one Fitzosbern who was a kinsman of William the Norman, and who fought beside him at Hastings and was rewarded with the earldom of Hereford. For a few years Fitzosbern was one of the most powerful men in England. His end is among the Dictionary of National Biography's most tantalizing brevities: "It was about Christmas 1070 that the earl was sent by William to Normandy to assist his queen in administering the duchy. But at the same time Baldwin, count of Flanders, died, leaving him one of the guardians to his son Arnulf. The Count's widow, Richildis, attacked by her brother-in-law, offered her hand to the earl if he would come to her assistance. He did so, and was slain at the battle of Cassel, where her forces were defeated early in 1071." I could bear to know more about Richildis.

As the train left Chepstow we could see across the broad reach of the Severn the silver barrage balloons above Bristol, and we came to Cardiff in golden afternoon sunshine. Cardiff was taking things seriously. The railway station was a mass of sand-bags in all directions, and signs with arrows pointed the way to the confused traveller. We got into a musty taxi and confided to its cheery driver our bit of paper with the Passport Office address. On the way there, down the main street, we discovered with groans of dismay that it was Early Closing day, and all the nice shops were shut, when we had hoped to buy local books and pictures.

The Castle at Cardiff, whose outer walls are most impressive, has been thoroughly modernized by the House of Bute. Ordinarily shown three days a week if the family is not in residence (fee, 1*s.*, proceeds to charities) the Castle was now open all day long and a public air-raid shelter had been constructed within its walls. There was a new wooden

foot-bridge entrance running into great ranks of sand-bags, and the public passed in and out at will, investigating.

It was here at Cardiff Castle that tempestuous Duke Robert of Normandy died, though not in the tower which bears his name, for one is compelled to mention that it was built long after his time. He was captive there nearly thirty years, during which time he learned the language of his Welsh jailors and rather astoundingly turned poet to while away the time.

In the centre of Cardiff, just north of the Castle on land which once belonged to it, is Cathays Park, with a group of modern public buildings which are the pride of the town. Planted and spacious and full of majestic white stone, it is a superb civic advertisement. We drove straight past it to a tree-shaded street where an old stone house had been converted into the Passport Office, with a tatty cardboard sign on the door. We climbed stairs none too clean or cheerful to offices fitted with the plainest of emergency furniture and a few stray chairs. There was no crowd. The unfinished surface of the trestle table was littered with printed forms. Officialdom always scares me. I sat down and began to fill in the blanks, using my passport as a guide, gripping a bad pen too tight, with my insides in a hard knot.

Then I came to the place reserved for my Registration number as an alien, and stopped dead. I hadn't got one.

Visions rose up of having to dash back to Cheltenham Police Station to get it—of travelling all night in the blackout—of not being able to get a train to Southampton in time to catch the boat. . . .

Finally, with everything else in order, and clutching my passport, I flagged a vague and uninquisitive little man who wasn't taking any notice of me and explained about the Reg-

istration number. What did he do? He ran his pencil twice through the place where it should have been, and said, "That'll be all right." He took my passport and the printed form away into an inner room, and presently brought them back, stamped and finished, and gave them to me with a kind smile.

As we went back down the dark old stairs to where the taxi waited in the sunny street under autumn-coloured trees, I felt as though school had let out. I wanted to celebrate. We told the sympathetic taxi-man we needed a nice tea, and he took us back to the main street to one of those places with wicker furniture. But the tea was beautiful, the assortment of pastries was limitless—I particularly remember giant macaroons of just the right glutinousness. We had brown bread-and-butter and jam too. And then, very full and infinitely comforted, we started to walk back to the station.

Everything was shut up tight, and we paused now and then to gaze wistfully at postcards and illustrated booklets on the wrong side of plate glass windows. On our left down a narrow street rose the lovely Perpendicular tower of St. John's church, golden in the evening light, but with trains the way they were we did not dare take the time to go in.

By the time we got to Gloucester again it was quite dark, and very cold, and the blue bulb in the roof of the carriage glowed but did not illuminate. There was an hour's wait at Gloucester, which was only fifteen minutes from Cheltenham, but there we were. We left the train and went up to the Refreshment-room, and there in an effort to get warm we had a weird cup of tea in the beam of a single lamp coned in opaque black so that only the counter with its shining silver and glass was lighted, and the young waitress's busy, competent, big red hands. There were two other travellers

drinking tea—a thin, quiet man with an attaché bag, and a solitary soldier in battle dress. We all stood near the counter, where it was lightest, and sipped the scalding tea, and discussed the evening paper. Warsaw had fallen at last on that glorious sunny day—"its only error a blind but unforgettable heroism"; officially the odds against Poland had been three to one, but actually they were nearer ten to one. The soldier shook his head, with a rueful smile; the thin man said, "That mayor—wonder what will become of him"; and I think we all knew, and dreaded to hear, what would become of him, and none of us cared to put it into words.

As a scene, it was completely unreal, melodramatic, and overdone. Bad theatre. You expected sound effects any minute. Over and over again we gave the cue for the bomb which never dropped.

At Cheltenham the taxi-driver we had engaged to meet the train found us by sheer instinct and led us to a dark shape in darkness which was his car, and smelled his way through the unlighted streets to the hotel. We dined blinking and dazed, and inordinately tired, alone in the brightly lighted dining-room. But in spite of everything we felt we had had a day to remember always.

Ribbentrop had not got his military alliance with Russia, by all the signs, and the Allies were unimpressed by vague Nazi threats of future "consultations" if the peace threat did not at once succeed. Somewhat ironical accounts filtered back of the vodka-cum-ballet-cum-caviare-cum-Jew-cum-champagne aspect of Ribbentrop's visit to Moscow.

So came the day when I was to leave England again—that familiar day of mixed regret and anticipation which for me always precedes a journey. Believe me or not, I had got used to Cheltenham, and my bed-sitting-room—and to

the war. I had been part of it. I had sent down roots. I had no sense of release from somewhere I didn't want to be. I wished the journey over, yes, as it did not promise to be a pleasant one, and I wished for my own warm bright rooms at home, and the friends there who would seem singularly carefree, and for the cosy family routine. But something of myself would stay behind at Cheltenham where we had made a daily life which would be incomprehensible and remote to everyone in America; where I had lived through something it would be impossible to convey the feel of to anyone at home; something intimate and precious, which could only have happened just the way it did happen in England, among the unique and unfathomable race which has evolved there during twenty centuries of recorded time.

My leavetaking is not a thing to dwell on. But as I went down the front steps of the hotel to the waiting taxi, one of the old ladies I had not known very well was just coming in the gate. It had not got round to her yet that I was going that day. She looked at the luggage and then at me. I held out my hand to say good-bye. She caught it in both hers, and held it, hard.

"Sailing—to *America?*" she quavered, and I too felt at that moment that I might as well have said Timbuctoo. "But it's so dangerous!"

"I shall be on an American boat," I said.

"Then you will be safe?"

"I think so," I said.

"*Quite* safe, I hope," she insisted gently. "God keep you."

She let go my hand and turned away, and I thanked her and got into the taxi. *God keep you.* No one else had said that.

Southampton again, and this time silver barrage balloons were shining in the blue sky above it. Nearly all station hotels are horrid, but I had been advised to go to this one because it was nearest the dock. It was very unlike Liverpool's palatial Adelphi where a year ago I had been so comfortable and—briefly—so relieved. To begin with, it was of necessity blacked out and sand-bagged, but this only partly accounted for its bleak dinginess. It was full of uniforms too, which occupied the attention and absorbed all the charm—if any—of the two vague and probably overworked young women behind the desk. Although I had wired ahead for a reservation, the room was less than second-rate and a private bath was quite out of the question. It was one of those hotels where everything was so flagrantly bad that one realized how expensive everything was.

A big American flag was painted on the black hull of the ship where it rose above the dock, more flags on her hatch-covers and bridge-ends, and one flew from her mast. When I went on board I was immediately surrounded by nice flat Yankee voices which for a short time surprised my Cheltenham ears.

No chance this time for my habitual luxury of a private single room. I had been assigned to a big stateroom for three with an adjoining bathroom, and I had the bed under the port. Both the other beds were made up, and there were two cots in the middle of the floor and another in the anteroom next the bath. We were limited to two pieces of stateroom luggage each, and one of these had to be my writing-case full of manuscript and note-books. The other was a dressing-case containing one complete change of clothes and that was about all. We were twelve days getting from South-

ampton to New York, with a five days' delay at Le Verdon off Bordeaux, and most of the time it was hot.

The French are an adorable nation in their mixture of sentiment and cynicism. A Frenchman's shrug can be the last word in heartless indifference, and yet he can make a gesture of benevolence that breaks you all up. As the star-spangled liner eased up to the quay at Le Verdon, a loud-speaker in the customs building began to play the United States national anthem. For a moment your throat closed out of sheer gratitude for such sublime tact—and then the effect skidded off into merriment, for something was wrong with the machine or the record so that everything flatted and squawked, and even the French dock-hands and officials, all standing meticulously at attention, were surprised into surreptitious grins. It played once through and began again, and then finished with a sort of flourish on the wrong bar entirely. But all the same it was thoughtful of them to try, and we appreciated it. The machine next essayed the "Marseillaise," with no better results except that they knew when it ended.

When we finally left Le Verdon for New York, the Bay of Biscay lived up to its reputation, and for two days everybody in our room subsisted on brandy and soda-crackers because the crowded conditions did not permit of hot food being brought to the rooms by the overworked staff. We were lucky, though. Two of the cots were not occupied, and everybody in our room was clean, charming, and spoke English. Next door to us in a smaller room were six women and a two-weeks-old baby that cried all the time. And some very odd-looking people speaking very odd languages had somehow or other achieved first-class passage somewhere.

It was an altogether hideous crossing, with twice as many passengers as the ship was meant to carry, and only half enough life-boat space for any normal sea emergency, quite apart from possible floating mines—which can't read—or short-sighted submarines. We were badly overloaded as to cargo as well, and in a heavy sea the ship had a roll and a wallow like nothing I had ever felt before. She sat so deep in the water that when she heeled even a little the American flags painted on her hull went right out of sight under water. At night we were, as the stewards put it, all lit up like a Christmas tree.

I am not, I suppose, of a passionately patriotic generation, and I have happened to travel only where I felt thoroughly at home and in no need of being rescued by the U. S. Marines. For years I have got to my feet for "God Save the King" a good deal oftener than I have had occasion to rise for "The Star-Spangled Banner." The British national anthem is a part of their daily life, to such an extent that in the lobbies of cinema theatres where the time-table of the films is posted, you will read:

NEWS REEL	9:45
CARTOON	10:00
BROADWAY MELODY	10:10
THE KING	11:15

THE KING comes at the end of almost any public gathering. And there is no scratching about under the seat for your gloves while the King's slide is on the screen and the anthem is playing. You stand up as you are and you go on standing *still* until it is finished. And if your eye runs along the rows in front of you, you can pick out from behind by

their rigid "attention" the men who saw service in the Great War, among the less formal posture of the younger generation. It would do us no harm, these days, to hear "The Star-Spangled Banner" a little oftener, without jingoism, but as a matter of course.

Each night during that long voyage home I would go out on the deck after dinner and lean over the rail to see that painted flag on the black hull of the ship just above the foaming waterline, illumined by big spotlights on projecting brackets from the boat-deck above. Each night as I made the turn of the after-deck, I would look up at the flag which fluttered theatrically from the masthead in a spotlight of its own. And it struck me very poignantly how that familiar design of broad stripes and bright stars bespoke safety for those in its charge. And the conviction grew on me that it would do us no harm either to "show the flag" with a little more ceremoniousness now and then, as the British do, in the ordinary run of things. It is such a gay flag, anyway, and so pretty to see.

The crossing was entirely without incident. That is, we didn't rescue anybody, nor see any submarines. On the thirteenth day we crept rather exhaustedly up the harbour past Liberty, whom nobody beheld without emotion, and I picked out at last the three grinning faces on the dock which belonged to me.

✦

I had had only five weeks of war, in a daily life so little removed from normal as to be very like a subtle nightmare, when you say "I'm dreaming" and still cannot wake up. But it took more than five weeks of American neutrality to accustom my eyes to the glorious sight of Broadway after

dark, or my subconscious nerves to the sudden sound of an ambulance siren in the street.

I was never actually in any danger, as danger is estimated these days. But it is a very healthful and illuminating experience for anyone to have in even so small a degree: to be not quite sure of tomorrow. It should be—and nowadays it very nearly is—compulsory for all adults, for a short time, at least once in their lives. It should not go on for months and months on end, God knows, and it should not happen to children at all. But a world which may be broken or snatched from you entirely by tomorrow takes on a sheen you have never noticed before on the happiest day. And no matter how content you may have been before, it is surprising how much you find you possess which you pray to retain a little longer, once the revealing uncertainty is upon you.

Pity the women of Europe. For years I have been noticing what is now the older generation in England—the fifties and sixties who were thirties and forties during the Great War—a little older than their age, a little vague about buses and crossing the street, a little slowed down by those four years of fortitude and suffering; but often with a fine-drawn serenity built up, God may know how, on some salvaged remnants of the things their youth rejoiced in. These are the women who stood to lose the fathers of their children, and perhaps their eldest sons on the battlefields of France twenty-five years ago. Look now at the middle generation of today, whose husbands survived by some miracle to found families and to build a gracious, charming life under the heavy economic strain of the post-war years. They now, like their mothers before them, face the possibility of losing in war what they hold most dear—with the added

threat of destruction by aerial bombardment of the home itself and of children too young to realize anything but a vague apprehension. But these women, after all, have known some of the best, and possibly some of the worst, that life can hold for them. Look last of all, and longest, at the girls in their teens, not yet ready for some quick gamble on marriage and happiness, but aware in heaven knows what inner terror and despair that the brimming cup of life may be dashed from their hands before they have so much as sipped it. They talk about it, among themselves. They face it alone at night, in the blackout. And their self-possession is frightening.

Since my return I'm often asked about the evacuees, affectionately known as vackies. I saw them come in busloads to the safety area where I was—crowds of rather dazed-looking tots, fairly well turned out by anxious mothers, each with a bundle and gas-mask. I saw them assimilated with incredible neatness and speed into the community. Later, I heard repercussions.

Before the war started I had been taken to call on the lady of a very lovely house inhabited only by herself and her husband, and she spoke humorously of what her lot would be if evacuation took place. She would have four small boys. She had been given a choice between that and two boys and a pregnant mother. As it turned out, she had chosen more wisely than she knew. In most cases where there is real trouble, and there are cases, it is usually the grownups who cause it. There is certainly a type of cockney woman that would be very trying to have introduced into one's home. The children of this type are certainly ungovernable except by a hearty clop on the ear. And there are certainly slum families whose personal habits are inconceiv-

able to the gently bred. I heard, before I left England, of houses where there were whole rooms whose fabrics had to be taken out and burned after a week's habitation by these evacuees. I heard, too, of brutal cold-shouldering and deliberate humiliation by householders who did not even wait to see what kind of people they were required to receive. I heard of childless old couples who were already trying to adopt their emergency charges, and of children who never wanted to go home again, and of children who never stopped crying and would not eat. I heard . . . I heard . . .

But this I *know*.

My char is a cockney woman who lives in a basement in the Paddington slums. She is clean, and gentle-voiced, she is trying to bring up two little girls to be clean and gentle, and she is very, very poor. Between us there has always been a bond of affection which there is no explaining. In 1938, and again in 1939, she was sorry for me because I was so far from home in a troubled world, she pitied me because twice over my English summer had been harried by the international situation, she deplored the extra expense I was put to, she hoped my husband in America was not too worried about me, there were tears in her eyes and she clung to my hands each time when we said good-bye. About once a month she writes to me, untutored letters full of honest affection, and each one contains a warm wish for *my* welfare, and a plea for news of me and mine. In 1938 her younger child had made herself ill with apprehension over the prospect of being evacuated without her mother. Soon after I went to the Cotswolds in 1939 both children were evacuated to a village in Surrey. Their mother stayed in London with her husband, who has a crippled hand from the last war, and who had got some kind of work in the building of

air-raid shelters. She wrote me that it was very lonely all day with nobody to talk to, but that the children liked it where they were. Then she wrote me that she had been down to visit them one day and they had never looked so well and strong. A typical letter from her during the winter lull ends thus: "The children are still away and keeping very well they tell me they dont wish to come home yet the youngest one said she had a birthday last Saturday they had a good time so that is the reason. your letter has taken 12 days to come. Such a long time on the way now isnt it. I thought you were ill as I didnt get a letter I do hope to hear from you again soon. and to see you again some time. Mrs Richmond."

I can think of worse house guests than such a woman, or her children, and there are more of her kind than the other, in my eleven years' experience of England.

Guesses are made that a few months or years of evacuation conditions will level away the last class barriers, and that when people from the poorer districts see how the better classes live a rising tide of class rebellion will force the government of England to spend millions on improving conditions everywhere. Possibly. Another likely result is that when the children in their impressionable teens have experienced the greater comforts of cleanliness and simple food, a great deal of internal revolution is going to take place within each separate household when those children return home, so that slovenliness and filth will disappear of its own accord under the new brooms of a younger generation which has broadened its viewpoint and raised its standards in country air and better living conditions. Not all slum evils arise out of sheer poverty. Many of them come from inertia, ill health, and sloth. A Warden friend of mine who

was using his car to evacuate aged and ailing people, was sent to collect a young woman paralytic from an unsavoury address and philosophically anticipated an unpleasant job and a possible cleanup of the upholstery afterwards. Not a bit of it. The flat where she lived was scrupulously clean in the midst of the usual slum clutter in street and passage, and she was described as "a very lucky girl" by the smiling parents who stayed behind.

It seems possible that this compulsory throwing open of doors and windows in the minds of the poor as well as in the houses of the upper classes, will weld an already homogenous nation into a healthier, friendlier whole, if only the war can end in a just peace before the essential strength and optimism of the English are too much sapped by rationing, blackouts, and—worse.

Another summer arrives as I come to these final pages, and with it has begun the total war which makes those first weeks of comparative quiet seem almost as remote as peace time. In America the querulous question is raised and reiterated: Why weren't they readier? Why can't they stop him? And the only answer is another question: Why aren't we readier here?

It was not altogether stupidity, or smugness, or ignorance, or political chicanery, and to assume that it was is wilful and short-sighted. Until a time well within the life-span of anyone who has come of age, the English Channel was almost as broad for the defence of England as the Atlantic Ocean is now for the isolation of America. And then, almost overnight, the Channel might as well not have been there at all. Furthermore, France thought she was ready, with the Maginot Line. Holland had her flooding system. Belgium had her citadels.

But, the querulous transatlantic voice goes on, they knew about the German air force, they knew what was coming. And the answer is, Yes and No. They knew the planes were there. They knew the itch to use them was there. But there was a thing called civilization. And in countries where churches have stood for nearly a thousand years in unblemished beauty, in cities which had pavements and palaces while America was a wilderness, there was among the common people an obstinate sense of security and—shall we say sanity. I know, because I felt it myself, over there, as a great many people still try to feel a similar security here. I myself felt it to be inconceivable that so much serenity and continuity and *good sense* could be in peril of its life. No, it was not just smugness, nor blindness, nor wishful thinking. It was civilization, up against barbarism. And they believed that we had finished with barbarism. Especially those who were too young to remember the last war believed it. This simple explanation does not, of course, excuse or justify the government officials who squabbled with each other and dealt in half truths, both in England and in France, while the storm gathered across the Rhine.

I have tried to write only of what I saw and heard at a crucial time in England's history. If it reads like English propaganda, I can only refer you to the New York columnist who observed recently that everything Hitler did or said was Allied propaganda. If I had spent the same time in France or in Holland it would have been approximately the same story in a different setting—but that is two other books. It is no longer possible to be pro-English or pro-French—one is either pro-democracy or pro-dictatorship. Empire, kingdom, duchy, or republic, all stand aligned against the same enemy—against the form of government which denies the

right of the individual to what the United States Constitution so touchingly describes as the pursuit of happiness: the right to laughter.

Millions are dying in Europe to preserve that right for those who can survive. If they all should die in vain, that constitutional right will have to be fought for in the western hemisphere too.

More than four hundred years before Christ, when Thucydides was writing the history of the Peloponnesian War, he evolved and set down one of the truisms which degenerate in the course of two thousand years into bromides. This is the way Thucydides put it: "I shall be content if those shall pronounce my History useful who desire to give a view of events as they really happened, and as they are very likely, in accordance with human nature, to repeat themselves at some future date—if not exactly the same, yet very similar."

And so, human nature having changed no more than the great Athenian anticipated, it was only twenty years and ten months since she last admitted defeat in the same project until Germany again undertook to conquer the world, push it into line, and make it march in goose-step.

England and France most surprisingly—to the Germans, who are perhaps imperfectly acquainted with Thucydides—had not changed either, and once more rallied gamely to the defence of liberty and individualism. Italy—as before—tried to sidestep. Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries ran true to form. Holland—as before—mobilized behind the same desperate neutrality. Belgium—also unchanged—prepared to defend herself, and only herself. The Balkans—where for once the trouble did not start—tried everything they knew for protective colouration in the diplomatic landscape.

There were two slight discrepancies after those two dozen intervening years. Russia had got out of step with history, and came in on the other side—though there are already signs that she is not altogether comfortable there. And Turkey, also under a new management, was seeing things differently in 1939.

A good many responsible citizens today have no first-hand, first-class recollections of what happened in that August twenty-five years ago, which so faithfully repeated itself last September. And a good many more who lived through it in agonizing detail are by now completely hazy as to how it happened. Except for those actually in the know, who were able at once to recognize in Sarajevo the pretext for setting the time-bomb, it came with a crashing suddenness, over Bank Holiday. People had no warning at all. There was some sort of fuss in the Balkans again, but they had got used to that—and then the whole world was at war. It must have been shattering.

In 1914 there was no radio, and consequently no war build-up. There had been no Austrian Anschluss, no Czechoslovakia, no Memel, no Danzig. An archduke was shot, with his morganatic wife (who was, incidentally, a Czech), and Austria began to bear down on Serbia. Germany backed up Austria. Russia backed up Serbia. France backed up Russia. Would Britain back up France? Perhaps not. But there was the small matter of a fifty-year-old guarantee of neutrality to Belgium, a mere scrap of paper, signed by England, France, and Germany. Germany tramped through Belgium, spreading havoc. And Britain went to war.

America's neutrality has been much more technical this time than it was in 1914. The Germany of those days was a fat and genial-seeming land to its tourists and its transat-

lantic relatives—it was associated in people's minds with good beer, and unctuous food, and sentimental music and the Blue Danube. Hitler has done away with all that. It is difficult for most Americans, of whatever descent, to work up much *Schwärmerei* for Hitler's Germany. But still, neutrality is America's story and she has tried to stick to it.

Norway was neutral too. So was Holland. So was Belgium.

But that's different, some Americans will point out hastily. Those countries are on Germany's doorstep. I have been unable to discover who it was that first made that crack about its being a small world, but he said it before the first transatlantic flight; before Denmark lost its peaceful sovereignty over Iceland and Greenland; before Holland was engulfed, leaving possessions in both the East and West Indies—on America's doorstep; before the collapse of France.

But Hitler, we must remember, is nothing new. In 1914 the American Ambassador to London was the wise and gentle Walter Page. In his published correspondence there appears a letter written by the English wife of a German living in Bremen; a letter Page thought so significant that he enclosed a copy to President Wilson in November, 1914. In it are foreshadowed and accepted by its writer horrors which we are likely to attribute to the ingenuity or madness of the present German Chancellor, who after all has only assimilated and carried out the original Hohenzollern idea: that is to say, the basic, essential, unalterable *German* idea:

". . . As to the future. You cannot win. A nation that has prided itself on making no sacrifice for political power or even independence must pay for its pride. Our house here in Bremen has lately been by way of a centre for naval

men, and to a less extent for officers of the neighbouring commands. They are absolutely confident that they will land ten army corps in England before Christmas. It is terrible to know what they mean to go for. They mean to destroy. Every town which is remotely concerned with war material is to be annihilated. Birmingham, Bradford, Leeds, Newcastle, Sheffield, Northampton, are to be wiped out, and the men killed, ruthlessly hunted down. The fact that Lancashire and Yorkshire have held aloof from recruiting is not to save them. The fact that Great Britain is to be a Reichsland will involve the destruction of inhabitants to enable German citizens to be planted in your country in their place. German soldiers hope that your poor creatures will resist, as patriots should, but they doubt it very much. For resistance will facilitate the process of clearance."

There, in a letter by one whom Ambassador Page describes as "a woman of sense, who did good social work in her early life," in a letter written in the early autumn of 1914 and aimed at England, is forecast the present fate of Poland and Czechoslovakia—the utter absorption of conquered territory to make room for German repopulation. The word then was Hohenzollernism. Now it is Hitlerism. Twenty-five years from now, unless something better than a Versailles Treaty is evolved, there will be a new word for the same insensate creed, but the capital will still be Berlin.

You wonder where America comes into this? Then let us go on with the letter:

". . . Now, one thing more. England is, after all, only a stepping stone. From Liverpool, Queenstown, Glasgow, Belfast, we shall reach out across the ocean. I firmly believe

that within a year Germany will have seized the new Canal [the Panama Canal] and proclaimed its defiance of the great Monroe Doctrine. We have six million Germans in the United States, and the Irish-Americans behind them. The Americans, believe me, are *as a nation* a cowardly nation and will never fight organized strength except in defence of their own territories. With the Nova Scotian peninsula and the Bermudas, with the West Indies and the Guianas, we shall be able to dominate the Americas. By our possession of the entire Western European seaboard America can find no outlet for its products except by our favour. Her finance is in German hands, her commercial capitals, New York and Chicago, are in reality German cities. It is some years since my father and I were in New York. But my opinion is not very far different from that of the forceful men who have planned this war—that with Britain as a base the control of the American continent is under existing conditions the task of a couple of months."

So you see America was not overlooked, even without Iceland and Greenland and the Dutch and French West Indies. History, said Thucydides, is likely to repeat itself. German human nature, at least, does not change.

As early as September, 1914, there had been talk of mediation and peace, with United States negotiations as an important factor. So far as I know, no one had at that time invented the trenchant remark with regard to United States mediation which runs to the effect that in back-seat driving it is customary at least to sit in the car.

In the winter of 1914 it was Colonel House who represented the American President. In 1939 we heard a good deal about the travels of Mr. Sumner Welles. Ambassador

Page's letter of the 22nd of September, 1914, to Colonel House, is as fresh and sound as though it had been written last week.

"When the day of settlement comes, the settlement must make sure that the day of militarism is done and can come no more. If sheer brute force is to rule the world, it will not be worth living in. If German bureaucratic brute force could conquer Europe, presently it would try to conquer the United States; and we should all go back to the era of war as man's chief industry and back to the domination of kings by divine right. It seems to me, therefore, that the Hohenzollern idea must perish—be utterly strangled in the making of peace.

". . . The danger, of course, as all the world is beginning to fear, is that the Kaiser, after a local victory—especially if he should yet take Paris—will propose peace, saying that he dreads the very sight of blood—propose peace in time, as he will hope, to save his throne, his dynasty, his system. That will be a dangerous day. The horror of war will have a tendency to make any person in the countries of the Allies accept it. All the peace folk in the world will say 'accept it!' But if he and his throne and his dynasty and his system be saved, in twenty-five years the whole job must be done over again."

It is discouraging to contemplate now the letters of this educated, far-seeing American, and those of his friend, the then British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey—so much wisdom, so much careful forethought, such endless patience and statesmanship, all gone for nothing in the exact space of time they themselves named, more than once, as the duration of a patched-up peace. It is most discouraging because they

hoped at last they had succeeded. The Kaiser was gone. The dynasty was gone. The throne was gone. But the *system*, the Prussian pattern of blind brutality, somehow survived in the blood and bone of Germany. We are told, and it is possible to believe, that a great many Germans hate it heartily. But it is not Hitlerism. It was there before he came. And according to Thucydides, who is right so far, it will be there when Hitler is gone.

Pressed by Colonel House to initiate a peace parley movement in London, Page finally replied in good plain English that America and President Wilson perhaps didn't quite understand the war. Page was there, in daily contact with English friends whose families were being decimated by the casualty lists. He was able to point out—and apparently he felt the necessity to do so in words of one syllable—that the English didn't want war and didn't hate the Germans and had no feeling of vengeance. But because Germany had set out to rule the world and conquer Great Britain, the English were simply resolved to all die first. "And they will all die," wrote Page to House in December, 1914, "unless they can so fix things that this war cannot be repeated."

And then he went on to wrestle with the problem which twenty-five years later is still unsolved:

"Now the question which nobody seems able to answer is this: How can the military party and the military spirit of Germany be prevented from continuing to prepare for the conquest of Great Britain and from going to work to try it again? That implies a change in the form, spirit, and control of the German Empire. If they keep up a great army, they will keep it up with that end more or less in view. If the military party keeps in power, they will try it again in twenty-five

or forty years. That is all the English care about or think about.

"They don't see how it is to be done themselves. All they see yet is that they must show the Germans they can't whip Great Britain. If England wins decisively the English hope that somehow the military party will be overthrown in Germany and that the Germans, under peaceful leadership, will go about their business—industrial, political, educational, etc. —and quit dreaming of and planning for universal empire, and quit maintaining a great war-machine, which at some time, for some reason, must attack somebody to justify its existence."

And now in the middle of a new war for the same old reasons, we are once more entertaining the same old hope.

Blunders were made at Versailles, heaven knows. But before we get too apologetic about that, let us remember that before the Allies (it is foolish to call them the victors) sat down to make the Peace, Germany and Austria had first made the War. And having failed in all she attempted, and then having failed—under a handicap, certainly—as a Republic, and failing ever since to feed and warm herself adequately, Germany is so constituted that she can again embark furiously on the same obstinate enterprise of world oppression. She must somehow be made to fail again; more bitterly than before, with more tragic results for herself and the whole world. And what will we do this time, for a Peace?

What kind of peace can be devised this time by the weary men who are, after all, the best men a free electorate can find to do the job—so that it will not all have to be done over again by their own sons? How can Germany be lived with by the rest of a world growing steadily smaller as the

speed and safety of transportation increase? Twenty-five years ago, when aviation had barely begun, Germany was eyeing the Panama Canal. Panama is much nearer to Berlin today.

Germany's answer to the great question is so simple when it arises in Germany: If a nation gives trouble, if a nation disagrees, if a nation stands in the way—exterminate that nation. Wipe it out, and put Germans where it was. That has happened in Poland. It is still happening, more quietly, in what was Czechoslovakia and Scandinavia. After the first few days of the Norwegian campaign Berlin dropped its pretense of "protection" and it was plain to see that Norway too was meant to be absorbed, depopulated, and overrun. It was to have happened in England in 1914, and Germany would dearly love to bring it off in 1940.

And just because Germans think that way, the democracies must once more try to devise a way of getting along with millions of defeated Germans who wouldn't do the same for them. Bled white again, exhausted, impoverished, grief-ridden, but somehow not defeated, the democracies must one day face each other round a conference table and find some way of saving Germany—from the Germans. Then there can be Peace.

INDEX

Alfred the Great, 15, 26, 33-4, 233
Armada, 8-11
Arthur, 26, 112
Asser, 33-4
Austen, Jane, 20-25, 32-3, 35, 117, 142
Avalon, 26, 112

Barrie, James, 41-3, 46
Bath, 22, 106, 117, 129, 136, 139-146
Bibury, 243-245
Bismarck, 100-104
Boer War, 193-202, 291
Bradenham, 85-7
Broadway (Worcs), 258
Burney, Fanny, 140-1

Caesar, 8, 136, 139
Cambridge, 90, 109
Canute, 14-18
Chawton, 24
Cheddar, 131-2
Cheltenham, 229, 239, 264, 272
Chepstow, 297-8
Chipping Campden, 237
Chipping Norton, 235
Cirencester, 242-3
Compton Wynyates, 86, 235-7
Cotswolds, 234-9, 242-5
Cumberland, Duke of, 93

Defoe, Daniel, 18, 26-8, 89-90
Devizes, 140
Disraeli, Benjamin, 45-6, 83-7, 99-105
Dolebury, 129
Dover, 105, 132
Drake, Francis, 8, 11
Druids, 92, 112

Ebrington, 237
Edmund Ironsides, 14-15
Edward II, 251
Elizabeth (Tudor), 9-10, 29, 89
Ely, 15
Epping Forest, 52-54
Ethelred the Unready, 14
Exeter, 88-89

Frome, 106

George IV, 93, 141
Glastonbury, 26, 108-116
Gloucester, 250-252, 300-301
Godmersham, 21
Guildford, 91

Hardynge, John, 27
Hatfield, 86, 237
Henry VIII, 109, 236
Henry of Huntington, 18
High Wycombe, 83-85
Howells, William Dean, 106
Hundred Years' War, 19

Ina, King, 136

Kensington Gardens, 41-45, 73, 150-151, 157, 159, 206
Kensington Palace, 46-50
Kensington Gardens Square, 57-8

Kipling, 79, 134, 189-193
Kitchener, 194, 279

Lancelot, 112
Lawrence, Sir Thomas, 140-141
LeGallienne, Richard, 243
Leicester, Earl of, 9
Lewes, 89
Liverpool, 178-182
Lower Heyford, 235

Melbourne, Lord, 46, 48-9
Mendip Hills, 109, 129, 132, 136, 139
Monmouth, Duke of, 108-109

Napoleon, 11, 282
Nash, Beau, 139

Oxford, 233-234, 277

Page, Walter, 315, 318-320
Peel, 291
Pepys, 139-140
Pitt, 142, 291
Portsmouth, 92-3

Robert of Normandy, 251, 299
Roberts, General, 194-5, 199, 201
Rollright Stones, 235-6
Roman England, 8, 136, 139, 242-243
Royston, 91

Salisbury, 28, 31, 91-2
Sandwich, 14
Seven Springs, 242
Shaftesbury, 18
Shelley, 233-234
Shipston-on-Stour, 237
Southampton, 8, 13-25
Speed, 14
Steventon, 21
Stonehenge, 92
Stow-on-the-Wold, 238
Stratford, 91

Thrale, Mrs., 140
Thucydides, 313
Tyrrel, 37

Victoria, Queen, 46-50, 93, 99-105, 201
Virginia Water, 93

Wace, 37
Walsingham, 9
Wells, 31, 106-110, 136, 138
Weston-super-Mare, 285
West, Benjamin, 141
William the Conqueror, 8, 26-7, 298
William of Wyckham, 35
William Rufus, 37
William IV, 47-9
Winchester, 13, 18, 25-37
Windsor, 93
Wookey Hole, 132-138